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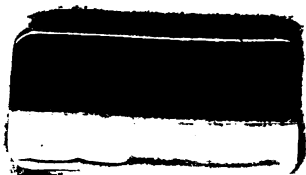
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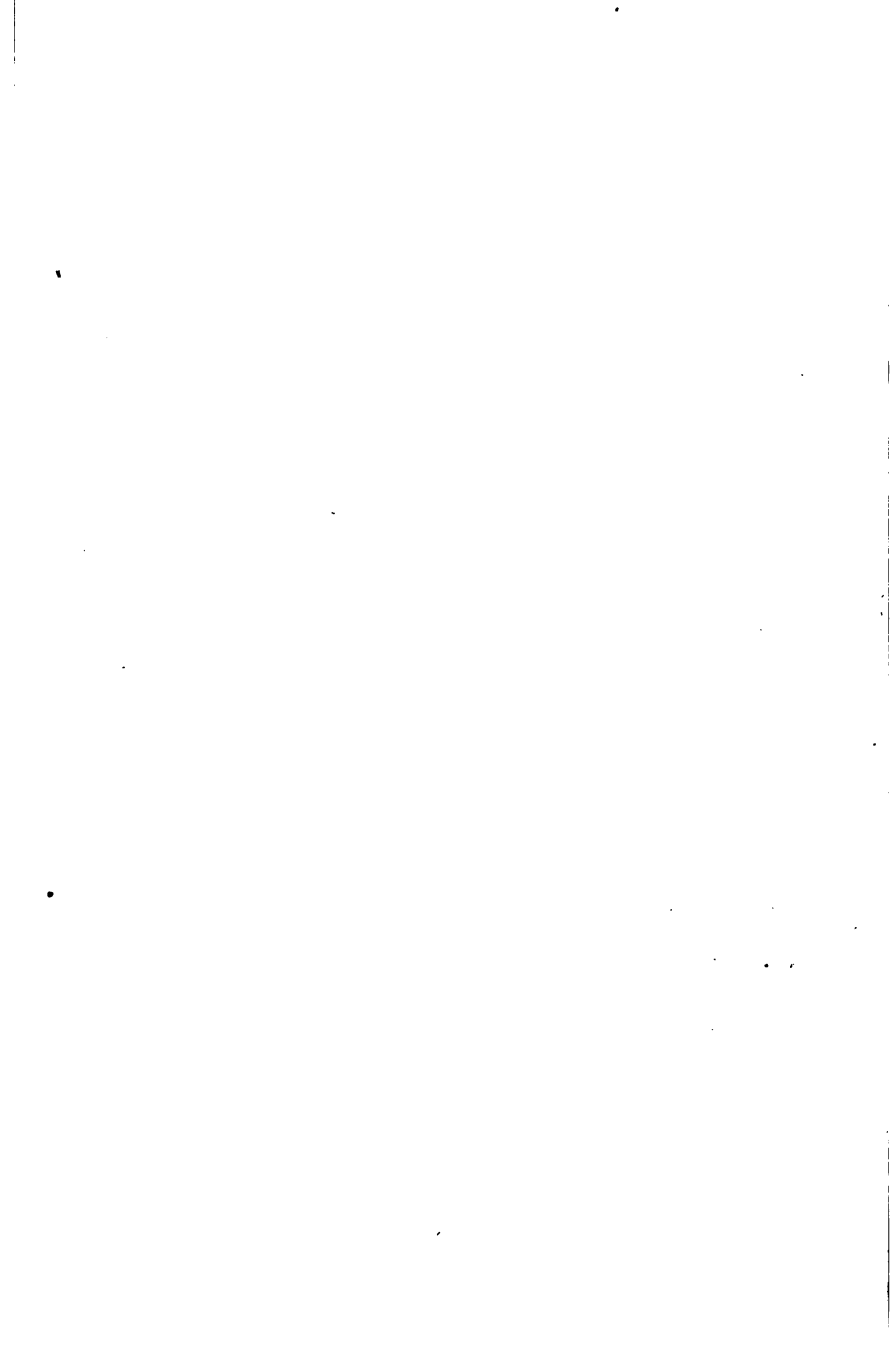
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THE
SCARLET SHAWL.

A Novel.

BY
RICHARD JEFFERIES.

LONDON:
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1874.

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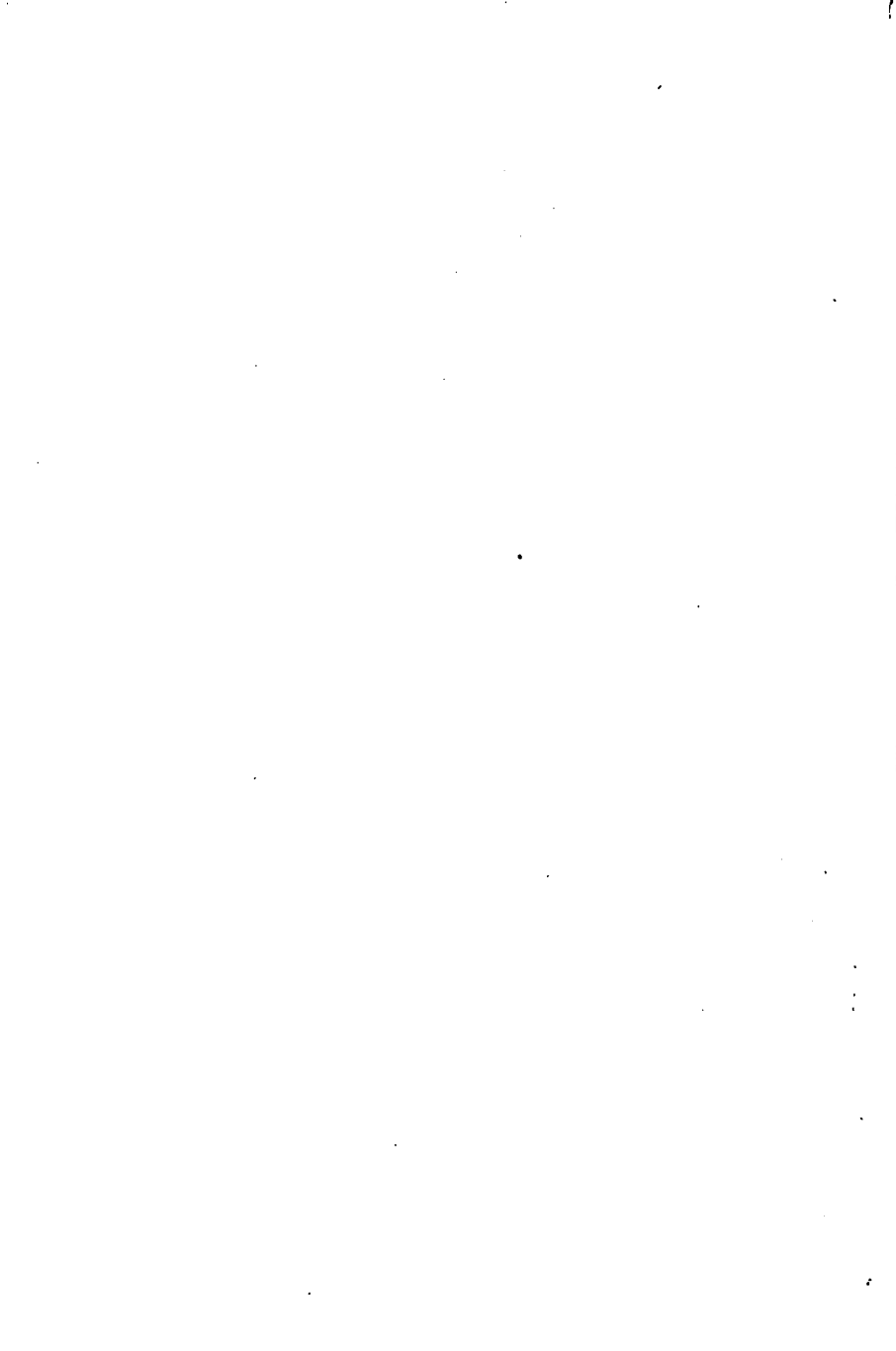
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AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MY EARLY TRAINING,
AND OF MY ESTEEM FOR HER GENEROUS DISPOSITION.

R. JEFFERIES.





THE SCARLET SHAWL.

CHAPTER I.

WILL," she said, underlining the word rather viciously.

Percival thought she never looked so handsome as when she was determined to have her own way.

They were not yet married these two, but she did not conceal her temper. His friends told him it looked very bad for their future; but he could not see any defect, which was the strongest sign of his really being in love.

Most of our lovers now-a-days are so calm and critical. They examine their ladies with an eyeglass, and "spot" (as they call it) the weak points, rather priding them-

selves on their ability to discover blemishes, much as they would over a horse.

It is bad form now to shut the eyes in the old way, and accept her as perfection. The development of intellect and the progress of education require us to reject the impulses of the heart, and to submit everything to the test of reason. Besides, most of the fellows have been in love so many times before they run the final heat, that it would be strange indeed if they did not go a little "stale" after such stiff training.

Walking unnoticed behind two young ladies the other day, aged, at a guess, respectively seventeen and eighteen, we overheard them compare their experience (!) of the men, and mutually come to the conclusion that they were frightfully wicked. They believed they never went to church of their own accord!

Delightful simplicity!

Louis Napoleon was the apostle of the non-enthusiastic and refined stolid cultus. His moustaches never curled one hair's-breadth the less, whether he was cheered on the Boulevards or bombarded at Sedan.

He was the prophet of the "take it cool" religion. Percival, however, had a nervously sensitive organization—savagely sanguine and barbarously vigorous. He never could screw himself down quietly into kid-gloves and dress-coats. Not but that he was civilized on the surface—only you had not got to scratch the soil very deeply before you came to nature, and nature in tropical profusion.

He knew it was no good; still he went on, trying to persuade her in the softest of voices. There was a pleasure even in the power, if not to divert her resolution, at least to make her defend it. He was going the right way to get her in a passion—he felt that; and yet he went on, under something of that sort of peculiar fascination which the exercise of cruelty—say, pulling a cat's tail—seems to possess over some minds.

A temper was, in the abstract, a bad thing; but this girl had got a way of making you accept her blemishes as beauties.

She was a most irregular creature. There

was nothing about her with which fault could not be found. She had a trick, for instance, of looking down in the mildest way at the carpet when she was getting irritated, till the blue-veined eyelids were almost closed, and the long lashes drooped on the cheek; and as the eyebrows were singularly arched, and set somewhat higher than the upper edge of the orbit of the eye, this habit gave her such an expression of modest self-depreciation that was fearfully deceptive. It only wanted a quiver of the eyelid and the lifting of one corner to make the face insinuatingly wicked.

It was impossible to finally determine the colour of her eyes. Most of her dearest female friends, who hated her, said they were green and cat-like. Two or three, with a refinement of detraction, said they were an uncommon grey, with a snatch of *eau-de-Nil*, and very *distingué* looking.

These eyes were a constant source of uncertainty to Nora. She admired every other part of herself devoutly, but about them she could never make up her mind

without a torturing remnant of recurring doubt.

She applied to Percival on the subject.

Poor fellow, he paused. He reflected that she must know very well they were green, and if he said they were grey, like Mary Queen of Scots, she would detect the flattery in a moment. On the other hand, it was such a horrible untruth to declare them hazel, that he had a great mind to say they were blue. But he did not dare declare them green.

He wound out of the difficulty by talking round it. He looked at the said eyes very earnestly, and described them as charmingly changeable. One minute they were nearly blue, then they grew lighter and grey. In the twilight they were exquisitely beautiful, like the first faint star of eve, whose colour you could not determine at first.

This silenced her; but, thinking of it afterwards, it did not quite do. It was not demonstrative enough. She liked demonstration.

One thing she felt certain about. No one

could find fault with her nose. It was straight, and delicately chiselled beyond all cavil, and the nostrils were almond-shaped, and not an unsightly pair of holes like so many. She sniffed the air, and threw her head back as she thought of it.

Yet there was a deficiency here too, according to young Bernais, who had been to Italy, and talked about art till he was accepted as an authority. Society found it better to give him the post than to listen to his claims. (If they had only served the Tichborne case in the same style!) Bernais had a way of flourishing his hand about, and describing a circle in the air with his finger, winding up his periods on chiaro-oscuro with a kind of "Er—er—er, you know."

He said that the nose was too good: it did not harmonize with the other eccentricities of the features. If you looked at it only, you thought it belonged to a Venus; but if your glance moved to the forehead, those extremely arched eyebrows put you irresistibly in mind of the portraits of

Harry the Eighth. She was a jumble of styles, each a thousand years apart—quite excruciating to an artistic eye.

There was, however, only one opinion about her lips. All the masculine commentators agreed that they were ravishing. So rich, you know; and so full and luscious, you know; and such a Cupid's bow, you know; so tempting, you know; and everything else that it was possible to know.

But the other girls saw a tiny mole just on the edge of the lower lip, a little on one side. It would be funny if the other girls could not see a spot somewhere.

Captain Edwards swore that he would lose his half-pay to be allowed to brush that spot off with his moustache; d——d if he wouldn't.

Ted Dickinson, who was in a raving state over Shakspeare, ranted out something about "She did make defect perfection."

It was reported that the "military" toasted that tiny mole enthusiastically at some of their parties.

"Not that *I* believe it," said Fanny Fil-

more; "but the men are absurd enough for anything."

Her chin was firm, with a shadowy hint of a double one—the face generally too broad for a delicate artist's oval ideal. This made the forehead broad and low, and the head large—"like a man's," some of the girls said; but Percival called it noble, grand, well-balanced.

She did not want any chignon or clump of hair behind to make it set well and ride easily on that splendid neck. For even the girls, after particularizing all the other defects, would qualify their blame with—"But she certainly has a fine neck" (which, in their delicate jargon, meant bust as well)—by way of showing that they were really candid.

All this criticism showed that the object of it had a wonderful power of attracting notice.

Percival recognised this, and did not altogether like it. He had seen her once or twice in a deep reverie, or what looked like that state, gazing abstractedly far away, and her eyes had a peculiar, almost phosphorescent light in them, faintly resembling

the shine of a cat's in the dark. After such a mood she was always more than usually trying and changeable, and difficult to please.

He had heard something of mesmerism, and magnetism, and zöoistic force; but only the words remained in his memory, and the general idea they conveyed was a dim suspicion that it depended upon certain peculiarities of the eye. He did not altogether like the thought of her using her eyes to mesmerize his friends. Not that he ever seriously considered it possible; but the fact was there ever present to his notice, that wherever she went she was always surrounded by a crowd of people who seemed to come round her naturally, and without special invitation.

He might have known, had he been a student of physiology, that the dreamy, abstracted gaze, and the odd light in her eyes at times, were only the concomitants of a singularly vigorous physical organization—an almost excess of animal energy—a panther-like *posé* of intense but subdued force. The magnificent development of the figure—the lithe movements of the long, graceful limbs—the striking style of walk, like one of the

antique statues warmed into life—should have suggested this to his mind.

But he was too much fascinated to analyse her. She had much the same power over him that a snake has over a bird; the poor thing cannot take its eyes from the splendid curling ornament in the grass, and holds its breath till its heart stays its action, and it flutters within reach as it falls. His attention was always wrapped up in her.

At first he tried to be magnanimously indifferent to the people who would crowd about her. Then he thought he would be proud of her attractive power, and rejoice in her triumph. Neither of these moods lasted more than six hours at a time. Finally, he gently hinted that a certain amount of moderation was desirable.

Nora smiled first, then yawned, and ultimately got in a temper, and said hard things to him. She could not understand life without admiration from every one she met. Heaven only knew what put this last whim in her head; but there it was, and Percival could not move it. At last she turned round on him in her usual way, and

accused him of selfishness and cruelty to her ; while at the same time he thought it was selfish and cruel of her.

The fact was, that although he felt it strongly, he had a very weak case. What earthly reason, save and except the sophistries of suspicious love, had he to urge against her visiting her aunt at St. Leonards? Every one went to the seaside in the autumn—why shouldn't she? The plan was perfectly irreproachable in the eyes of the world. It was no hotel and free continental *table d'hôte* business ; but a regular British formal aunt and fashionable mansion. As she said her aunt was particularly particular, it was exceedingly unkind of him ; and she did not believe he loved her much, or else he would trust her more.

After that he could say no more. But he did not like it. Outwardly it was all fair enough, but he had his suspicions. Wherever the sea was, there a yacht could come for one thing ; and there were certain parties cruising about in a yacht at that time that he did not approve of. But that was not all. Here he could see her every day ; he

could call whenever he chose. He knew everything she did ; it was impossible for her to go, or do, or hardly say a thing but he must hear of it, or have a hand in it. He had exercised this power so long that he had grown to insensibly consider it his right.

Her removal to St. Leonards would break up these pleasant old habits ; and, to tell the truth, he had a half-suspicion that she wished to be free of this constant supervision. This upset his self-love terribly. It was the most dreadful crime she could commit in his eyes. Not that Percival was more than usually conceited. But let any one put themselves in his place. This magnificent creature, whom he adored, always with him—all her tastes, habits, almost her ideas under his control, in a great measure ; and she seemingly, at least for a long period, delighted with her overseer, and now suddenly she turns restless, and betrays an evident desire to throw off the bridle. A man who knew himself better than Percival did, and with the very broadest view of others' feelings, might have felt a little ruffled. As for Percival, his half-tamed part, underneath

the thin surface of civilization, was working and seething up in a dangerous manner.

Ask a hawk how he would enjoy seeing the stricken partridge glide away from under his very talons. And Nora asked him to actually congratulate her on the change. It would do her health good. Do her health good—look at her! Much health she needed, truly. He was disgusted, and said so plainly—said that she was deceiving him, and very nearly called her a liar. He would never have spoken like that to another lady, but their relations were peculiar. Nora's last resource was a violent fit of temper—she raked up all the disagreeable things he had said and done for a half-year; and called him jealous, distrustful, unkind, rude (which he certainly was), and everything she could think of. Some of the points went home. The moment she began like this, Percival held his tongue and sulked. She overwhelmed him with reproaches and bitter cuts. Percival sulked the more. All this confirmed him in his original suspicion that she wished to be free from his watchfulness. At last he got up,

and said in the sulkiest tone he possibly could—

“The truth is, you know, you want to get rid of me.”

“Yes, *that* I do,” said Nora, vehemently; and the next moment regretted it.

He was gone without a word, and she was too proud to follow out of the room, though she might easily have reached him before he could get his horse saddled. In a few minutes she saw him riding across the park, and he did not once look back. Till he disappeared round the last clump of bushes she was half certain that he would turn and come back, as he had done so many times before; but he did not, and that offended her vanity still more. Her heart swelled for a little while, and nearly forced tears into her eyes; but she tossed her head, rang the bell, and ordered the carriage. She would go and visit her pensioners, and do a little “charity.” This was just her absurdly inconsistent way. Feeling like a tiger ready to tear any one’s eyes out, she went to visit old women and give them a small bottle of port and tracts.

She was in an agony of uncertainty for all this indifference next day at the railway station, as to whether or no he would come to see her off. Up to the very minute that the bell rang she was sure he would come. But he did not. Her eyes were in a doubtful state again ; she felt it very much ; she could not break off that long association so easily. He was fast winning the day ; but he did something quite superfluous.

And here let us have a few moral reflections in the correct style. It is a mistake to do anything superfluous. The English Church even took great pains to exclude the merits of works of supererogation. He knew very well which side of the train she was sure to choose in order to see her favourite view down the valley of the Ouse, and as the train went thundering over the viaduct, looking out of window there she saw Master Percival sure enough, sitting in his punt fishing in the warm autumn sun, and smoking a cigar, with a most confounded air of *dolce far niente*.

It was superfluous, Percival ; quite superfluous. She hardened her heart against

him. He shut himself out of her mind, which began to dwell on things which it ought not to do. She was very restless though in the carriage—the knowledge that she was about to plunge into what was at best mischief, if not wickedness, made her limbs tremble a little, and her heart beat irregularly.





CHAPTER II.

RACHEL never knew her own mind more than ten seconds at a time, counting by the jewelled, tiny dial jauntily stuck in her waistband. The power of doing just as she liked was no doubt the chief cause.

This is a caution to foolish old uncles not to leave nice little fortunes to ten times more foolish though lovely nieces. It quite destroys all consistent purpose, ruins resolution, fosters uncertainty—ah, what a deal of evil this money breeds. If she had been poor and obliged to work for her living, it would have probably trained her mind till it grew consistent, determined, steady to one purpose for at least several weeks at a time. Poor people have to make up their minds as to what pleasure they will enjoy months

beforehand, and then work, and save, and contrive, and act consistently till they get it.

Rachel infected Nora very quickly. Nora had immense capabilities for imitation, as all great geniuses have, say what you will. Genius is a Herculean ability to learn; whether it be from nature or from man, to learn it is necessary to copy. She was always a faithful reflex of the society she was in at the time. With Percival she was as carping, critical, and snappish as the most jealous lover could possibly be; for that was the normal condition of that young gentleman's mind at the present, all the fault of having had his own way too much lately.

Rachel, in a few days, made her as merry as herself, and nearly as restless. They slept together of course, and before breakfast held a council of war as to what was to be done. It was finally resolved that they were to bathe, to ride, and to have a row, and go on the pier. But Nora, finishing her masses of brown hair before the glass, thought that she should look very odd with it all hanging like so much damp seaweed down her back. Rachel said it made her arms ache to row.

Nora had ridden so much she was tired of it. Rachel said the pier was the commonest, slowest place in the world. So the end was that they did neither. Aunt Milly had gone out when they came down, leaving a little slip of paper on each of their plates, on one of which was written—"Go to the ant, thou sluggard;" and on the other—"The fool foldeth his hands and crieth, Yet a little more sleep." The small, poor woman really thought she was doing good, and in point of fact provoked a conversation in which her feeble follies were freely laughed at.

It was astonishing how fond these two girls were of each other the first evening they met. They sat hand-in-hand, and called each other "my dear" and "my darling," and poured out all their news, and purred like two cats. But finding themselves alone in the morning-room next day, about half-past eleven, with nothing but half-a-dozen illuminated books on the table, each of which the newspapers said was a triumph of art, and which nobody ever looked at, to amuse themselves with, they found it rather dull. Nora sulked a little. Rachel

grew restless, vibrating about like a magnetic needle after it has been shaken. The one thing needful was wanting—

“True as the needle to the pole,
To whiskers points the female soul.”

In about an hour they were on the highway to a desperate quarrel. The windows had something to do with it. The house was so aristocratic and so grand that you could see nothing from the window, not a passing individual, or anything more lively than the inevitable organ-grinder making the round of the square. They simultaneously agreed that it was impossible to stop in the place any longer. Rachel declared she'd sooner be a governess. They started for the beach, but did not reach it.

The more guilty we are the more we try to be merry, especially if it is that species of guilt which the world would rather applaud as high-spirited, though our own inmost conscience is ashamed of it.

Nora found herself walking by the side of Herbert Spencer towards the downs, without any distinct idea as to how she got there, except a dim remembrance of meeting a party

of gentlemen dressed in approved athletic costume, *en route* to the athletic sports at the corner of the square. Rachel knew most of them, and that was how it happened. Nora's senses were a little confused by the conflict of her better and her reckless natures, and she was for a few minutes scarcely conscious of what she was saying.

This was the very fellow Percival detested, and she knew very well that when he went on about some men's company being enough to disgrace any lady, this was the person he was alluding to, though he never mentioned names. She felt that he suspected her of an interest in Spencer's doings, and she acknowledged to herself that she would not have so readily divined his feelings if there had not been some ground for them. Not that there was anything in Herbert personally for any one to be jealous of. She thought that, when after walking half a mile or so she had recovered herself and stolen a glance or two at him when he was not aware. He was tall enough and big enough to have a manly bearing at a distance, and there it ended. His nose was flat, though straight; his eyes

grey, with a trick of rolling about; his hair a straw-colour, and his whiskers red. A large, coarse face, without a redeeming feature; and the skin all spotted with great pimple blotches; disagreeably suggestive of an incipient stage of the plague.

How many skin diseases has dissipation to answer for? The doctors dare not tell you; it is part of their profession to find more palatable causes. There was nothing in this man's face to make another jealous, or to move a woman's heart.

Nora thought him horridly ugly, and persistently kept from looking at him after the first glance; and yet she walked on with a smile on her face, contentedly listening to his commonplace remarks. She thought him dreadfully vulgar, and something of a bore; yet she did not leave his side and join Rachel, who was chattering gaily a few yards in advance with two or three gentlemen at once.

It was the man's reputation; and a bad reputation too, founded mainly on a few facts of the coarsest kind in *la haute venerie*—an unlimited ability to drink, and a

certain bulldog courage, for which he was notorious.

There is not time to analyse the why and wherefore of a girl like Nora putting herself under the wings of this gentleman. She did not exactly recognise them herself. The sensation of guiltiness had a little to do with it. There's an *éclat* about mischief which virtue sighs for in vain. Herbert, moreover, did not disguise his admiration. He very soon went the length of telling her point-blank that she was the finest girl of the season. Any lady with proper feelings would of course have left him in a moment with a look of ineffable disgust. But Nora was dangerously fond of admiration; and this man's, however coarse, was evidently genuine.

For the moment though the bold avowal sent a hot blush over her cheeks, and left a tingling in her ears; and there was a feeling of repulse in her inmost mind. She had received the first rude blow to her natural modesty. That is a species of metal which, no matter how soft at first, speedily gets hardened and tough by judicious hammer-

ing. Not that Herbert was judicious—on the contrary, he laid on the flattery inch-deep and with the strong hand, and yet perhaps a keener intellect would not have succeeded so well as he did on account of the very frankness. If he had attempted to insinuate a compliment, she would have rejected it instantly. And all the time she knew he was doing it for his own interest—that he cared not a jot whether she suffered in consequence.

The man she instinctively felt was vulgarly selfish to the backbone. Yet she walked by his side with a smile, looking down in that peculiar way of hers, with the white eyelids trembling, and the eyebrows slightly elevated, apparently perfectly happy. She was looking at his legs cased in knickerbockers and stockings with stripes—true athletic style.

Percival always wore the most civilized and humdrum costume. She told Rachel afterwards that she should like to wear stockings like that herself.

Herbert was down on the programme for throwing the hammer, and his friends had

backed, him pretty heavily ; but he was nowhere to be found. One of the rules of conduct, which he had managed to batter into his thick head, was to make hay while the sun shines.

He voted the sports slow, and early drew Nora out of the ground and away on the downs, where he had her all to himself.

It was shameful of her, a respectable girl, to wander about like this with a man she had only met once before—very disreputable indeed.

Nora knew that, and felt it ; and the more she thought of it, the more she resolved to be recklessly imprudent.

Herbert, however, began to repent of his bargain ; not that he wished to get rid of her, but he had an engagement down on the beach in half an hour ; and how the deuce he was to get there—if he knew might he be — no matter what. And as he could never carry two ideas in his head at once, he grew silent and pre-occupied, which she soon saw, and actually asked him what was the matter. He told her outright that he had promised to sail a craft in the regatta

that afternoon, and time was up; and, by Jove, how he should get there, and the wind rising too; and he pointed to the sea, instinctively drawing his arm away from hers in the excitement.

There it was far beneath them, dotted with white foam as far as the eye could see. Somehow he could not tell how Herbert felt that the girl beside him would dare anything if she chose; and, half-astonished at his own cool assurance, he asked her to come with him. "And, by Jove," he told Captain Edwards afterwards, boasting of his success to that disgusted gentleman, "if her eyes didn't give a flash, and she said she would." He seized her arm without a moment's delay, and drew her rapidly to the side of the cliff, where there was a dizzy path down to the beach. Before she was aware of what she was doing, she was scrambling down the steep precipice, clinging for bare life to the strong man's arm, with the roar of the sea coming up from below and the gulls flying round her.

What a pleasure there was in a strong man's arm—what confidence it gave; she

yielded herself up to the excitement of the moment, and when they got to the shingle her heart was beating fast and her blood leaping through her veins.

Spencer was right—this girl would dare anything!

Understanding nothing of these things, she did not take any particular notice of the craft or the crew with which she was about to venture herself. She had a dim idea that the sea was roaring very loud, and that was all. They placed her comfortably in the stern, seated on a pile of spare sails, and Herbert was just behind her at the tiller.

“Well, I’m blowed,” muttered Jim, as they worked at the capstan; “if this ain’t about the rummest go as ever I seed—a lady to come along wi’ we, Bill—and *such* a day as this will be. Here she comes.”

The first wave, as the craft moved slowly down the beach, struck the stem with a force that shook Nora on her seat, and sent the spray far over her head. She only laughed, and said the spray was deliciously cool. Her cheeks were hot with the exercise of coming down the cliff. In another minute

they were afloat, and the hawser came in more easily, the friction being so much less. They met the waves stem on, and the boat's head was dragged down by the ropes from the buoy almost under them, and twice they nearly shipped a sea.

“Steady,” said Spencer.

They had to wait till each wave had passed, and then turn. There was no mistake about it, they were in for a tough one. Nora thought the motion delightful, just like swinging, and the waves such a lovely green. She always said she never should be sea-sick; now wasn't she right? (They had been out about three minutes.) Herbert did not answer; he was trying to make out what craft there were afloat to compete with, and what signal was flying from the umpire. He could only see as they rose; when they fell, land and all was out of sight. His brow contracted as he glanced from the great, green waves at the shallow boat he was steering.

“No decks,” he muttered. “There's the devil of it.”

He set his teeth seeing Nora, and a nasty look came over his face.

“There’s that old cuss from Eastbourne, sir, with the rakish gear,” sung out one of the men ahead; “she ought to be sunk—she ain’t no right to be sailing agen us. And she’s sure to object if she finds we’ve got a gent aboard.”

Herbert made no reply, for at that moment they ran up the foresail, slipped the cable, and away she went. The mainsail was set, and Nora felt the boat heave up under her as the wind heeled her over. Then there was a sensation like a bounding horse, and a hissing sound ahead, and she knew that they were gliding rapidly through the water. This was altogether a different motion—first up, then down, and then a long slide, and up again. It was easier, but rather queer—they were about five points from the wind, and easing off a little. The signal was flying for all ready, and they were nearly ten minutes behind. There was a reef in the mainsail, and Herbert looked at it askance, and then at the lee-gunwale,

which was rather too close to the water. Still he had a lingering inclination to shake it out.

They were about half a minute behind their post when the gun fired, and the race began. For a second or two he stood it calmly; he saw the great, rakish Eastbourne cutter roll over almost on her beam with a press of canvas; he saw the dark sails of the lugger on their right fill like balloons.

“Hanged if he could—out with it, Bill.”

The reef was out in a minute, the gaff run up, and the foresheet loosened, so as to belly a little and draw more. Herbert eased her off, and she ran parallel to the shore, and nearly broadside on to the swell. She was going at the deuce of a pace. The men saw his idea in a moment. The yacht round which they were to sail stood somewhat out to sea, and their present course was too much to the right; but theirs was the smallest craft and no deck, and coming back it would be close-hauled. (The wind nearly dead against them.) Now was their chance, if at all. The decked boats would beat them hollow at working into the wind.

So he loosened everything, and spread every inch of canvas, and sailed as straight before the breeze as he could, heedless of the lee-gunwale, which went under water every time she rolled.

Nora, sitting to windward, watched this phenomenon curiously, puzzling over a singular effect. Though the side of the boat was right under the water, it did not come in. It seemed to run along on the top of the gunwale, and fall off as the boat rose. She could not understand that at all. It was the rapid motion probably.

To the crowd on the parade this mode of Herbert's seemed at once to put them first, but the knowing ones shook their heads. But above the sound of the waves, and the hissing at the stem, and the whistling of the wind, there came a faint noise of a cheer from the beach as the smallest craft of all forged to the front.

Nora's ears, ever on the watch for admiration, caught it in a moment, and she smiled with delight—conscious, however, at the same time of a sensation about the waistband and rising upwards, which she

would not acknowledge to herself. She said it was glorious fun—there was nothing she liked so much. Herbert spared a glance from his mainsail at her, smiled grimly, and recommended her to look at the distant horizon, and to avoid watching the waves. She understood him, and tried it; but the waves would keep attracting her eyes, and she got tired of staring up at the sky overhead. She began to bite her lip, which was her habit when she wished to suppress anything.

They were unmistakably ahead now, but the critical time was coming. They took in a reef, tautened the foresail, and bore up for the flag-boat. In a minute or two Herbert saw that he should have to stand a furlong or so out to sea, or she would never fetch it. He jammed his helm tight, but it was no good; she would drift in that devil of a sea.

Nora's first fright was when they put the craft about, and Herbert forgot to tell her to change sides. Her hand on the gunwale was suddenly under water, and she scrambled across to the other side in the most un-

dignified manner. Conscious that the men ahead were laughing in their sleeves at her, she was sulky and cross with Herbert in a moment; but he was too occupied, and she speedily had something else to think about.

The craft was close hauled now on the return, and although she had lost so much in rounding the flag-boat was still on a level with the larger vessels. But Herbert felt that he was losing with every sea he met. She went into them bravely, and he held the tiller hard; but it was clear to his practised eye that she could not hold her own. In five minutes this was apparent to every one. He had glanced aside to see how the rest were progressing, and that single second did the mischief.

The wind fell a little. The men looked up quickly; but before they could speak the boat's head was round, the mainsail shook, and the foresail flapped with a noise like thunder. The craft trembled as the mast vibrated.

Alas! Ulysses. Let thine eye slumber but a moment, and Neptune is upon thy frail raft with all his fury!

Nora turned pale and clung tight to the thwart, and stooped instinctively as the boom rattled over her.

Herbert was a fool on shore, but sharp enough afloat. She heard what sounded to her like a volley of strange, unintelligible oaths—in reality the language of the sea. In an instant the foresail was loose, the main-sail taut, and round they came—to Nora's intense astonishment, sailing straight away from the goal.

She looked up at Herbert's face. It was burning red. This great, coarse, rude fellow was absolutely ashamed. He felt that the fellows on shore were sneering at him for his false seamanship. But he stood to it like a man. He let her get a little way, and then executed the most dangerous manœuvre possible. He eased off her head till she was straight before the wind, and then jibed the sail.

Nora was flung like a sack from one side of the boat to the other by the jerk, and the spray flew over in a cloud; but the mast stood the strain, and away they went again. Herbert had seen that she could

not hold her own close hauled, and had determined to try another plan before the foresail so unfortunately flapped and threw him far in the rear. He knew that the umpire's boat, which they had to pass, was anchored a good way from the shore. Instead of trying to pass her close hauled, he would ease his helm, run at an angle towards the shore, and risk it.

They flew. He shook out the reef in the mainsail; he had the gaff up again. The men stared, but obeyed his orders.

Nora was awfully cross with him for flinging her about in that offhand manner, and taking no more notice of her than if she had been a dog. But she glanced up in his face once more, and saw that there which made her keep silence. She recognised in this rude brute the strong, fierce courage of a man, and for a little while it made her forget even her overweening vanity.

Another distant, faint cheer from the shore. Her heart beat faster again. They were admiring him, and she was with him. That blotched, spotted countenance was

heroic then. They were forging forward once more; but the distance between them and the beach was narrowing frightfully rapidly. Was there sea room enough? Herbert did not care a rap now whether there was or was not. He had made up his course, and he would run the boat right into the breakers before he would alter it. But the men grew terribly anxious. Their livelihood depended in great measure upon that boat, and the surf, if they did get upset, would beat the life out of the strongest man on the hard shingle.

Nora heard the deepening roar as they grew nearer and nearer, and saw the great bank of beach rise higher and more distinct, till she fancied she could recognise faces among the crowd. The beach was literally black with eager masses of people; the element of danger, in the race had drawn them there. The cheers were frequent and loud now, but after awhile there was a dead silence. It was getting so close. The awful grinding noise of the breakers, as they sucked back from the beach, grated on

Nora's ear, and she clung to the thwart till her nails indented the wood.

Herbert made a sign with his hand, and the men did something with the ropes while one of them placed an oar ready. A lurch of the boat flung this oar sharply against Nora's arm and bruised it; but she took no heed in the excitement of the moment. Herbert calculated on the undertow to keep his craft from striking; but as yet they had not felt it, and the strong breeze was driving them on shore. Cries came to them now to desist—eager cries to save themselves—heard even above the roar of the breakers.

Nora saw the beach rush towards them, and shut her eyes. In an instant the sails were down and the oars out; but the boat, as she sprung up, staggered and shipped a sea. Nora was soaked to her skin in an instant, and thought she was overboard; but she did not scream—her teeth were grinding convulsively. In another minute there was a deafening cheer, and she opened her eyes and saw that they had passed the

line of the umpire's boat. The crowd had waited till they were safe before cheering.

The strong rowing of the men was slowly taking them away from that horrible beach and the hungry roar of the sea. Nora felt a thrill of unutterable triumph. Her soul rose on the breath of popular applause; but in an instant it was down again. The crowd had seen a lady, and she heard a shout for that brave "gal." That disenchanted her thoroughly. Ten minutes afterwards they ran ashore in a sheltered cove, and she stood dripping on the land.

Herbert offered her his arm, but she hastily wished him good-bye, and utterly refused to allow him to accompany her. She was mad with herself already. She hated Herbert and his nasty, vulgar, common sailing. It was all his fault—great, coarse, red-haired brute; she detested him. She had committed the very worst fault a flirt could possibly do; she had compromised herself with this looby. She who had prided herself upon her skill in playing with fire, had exhibited herself to a public crowd, cooped up with this fellow in a boat in a common regatta,

among a lot of fishermen. Her ears tingled as she walked along, her wet dress clinging to her legs adding to her ill-temper. She was a sight. But what angered her most was the childish way in which she had let this man lead her about. What would her dear friends say, especially her rivals in the art of coquetry? So very thoughtless, dear, you know—not that *you* meant anything, of course; but people *might* say, and so on. If she only knew the back streets; but she did not, and was forced to march the whole length of the parade; luckily most of the people were on the beach just then. She had half a mind to ring the servants' bell, and slip in the back way; but somehow her nature revolted against such meanness.

She walked right up to the front door, rang the bell, and went straight upstairs. She could not have done better. Fortune favours the bold. Aunt Milly was at dinner; she dined early—at six, and there was no one about but the servants, who dared not say anything. She tore off her things, and actually took her place before the second course was on the table.



CHAPTER III.

MOTIVES are perhaps the scarcest things in real life. The first question asked in a court of law is, What was the motive of the crime? Machiavelli and his school would teach us to search for the motives of men and women, and shape our course accordingly. For ordinary events, and in nine times out of ten extraordinary ones, this is a sheer fallacy. People don't trouble themselves to have motives. Not one in a hundred ever steadily pursues an object. It is too much trouble to keep the mind always fixed; the tension is unbearable. Circumstances, impulses, the most trifling occurrences, decide the majority of people in their daily life. Gerard Wootton, Esq., could never have given a reason for his visiting Aunt Milly. It

was quite true that he was her trustee, and as such had the handling of her money, about which she absolutely understood nothing at all, and it was exceedingly pleasant to have several thousands at his, or rather her bankers, ready at a moment's notice to meet his numerous demands. But that was not the reason. He was not mercenary, at least not meanly so; that was not his vice, as it is the all-besetting vice of so many who pride themselves on their piety. He would not have flattered the old lady for the sake of her money—not if he had been starving. He did not come there for amusement—at least, not in the usual sense. It was the dullest house he knew, and there were morning prayers at which every guest was supposed to be present—a thing he detested. He did not come for the hunting—the hunt in the neighbourhood was a sham, and the fellows all cads; nor for the sea, nor indeed for any other perceptible motive. His visits were determined by the most trifling circumstances or train of reverie; but when he did come, and sat himself down at her table, a very peculiar smile spread

itself over his face for the first moment, which all the training of thirty years in good society could not entirely suppress.

Aunt Milly was very "good." She worked hard at making petticoats for old women, and mittens and stockings for poor children. She spent a full hundred a year in tracts; she really believed in what she did, and in what she professed to believe. But it was in the narrowest of ways: mentally, and morally, and socially. As a specimen, in her eyes it was wicked to read the newspapers on a Sunday—highly immoral to write a letter. Our blessed Lord never did either on that day, and we were to copy Him in all things if we wished for salvation.

Rude Herbert Spencer, one day when she had been lecturing him in this style, blurted out that as for being saved, he'd be considerably something first if he believed that he was lost yet. The dear, good old lady, instead of being mortally offended with this piece of impiety, really was quite concerned, and actually set to work to convert him. Now this was a blind mistake—the very term convert was enough to drive Herbert to the

other extreme. But it was a clever stroke compared to her admiration of Wootton. She thought him the perfection of men—an example for all youth.

The wicked old *roué* thoroughly enjoyed this. Verily, if he had a motive in coming to that dull house in dull, used-up St. Leonards, it was to see this creature floundering in the snare of her own narrow ideas, and blindly admiring—*him*. He, her ideal of morality, an example to youth! No wonder he smiled. The situation exactly suited the cynical temperament of the man.

This was the gentleman Nora found sitting at her aunt's table. She did not notice him at first—she was too confused, and too anxious to appear as if nothing had occurred, to observe if he had a tail or not. In one of these moods of hers, she had such a blundering way with her, that she would not have started if he had. He had, but he kept it out of sight; likewise the cloven foot. But Gerard was a man accustomed to make himself *felt* in society. He did not engross the conversation or attract attention by irregular scintillations of wit. It was im-

possible to note what he did say or do ; but somehow, go where he would, he had a circle round him. Of course he thought Nora a splendid creature. A man who had passed a lifetime in observing and criticising feminine beauty could not fail to remark that. But at first he did not trouble himself much about her. Slowly, however, the cautious old trout rose at the tempting fly. He did not talk to her ; his conversation was chiefly with Aunt Milly ; but somehow, without talking *at* her either, he contrived to make her feel that a good deal of what he said was meant for her. Nora almost unconsciously perceived this, and was at her ease in a moment, and consequently soon began to shine.

Have you any wish to know why she felt at ease ? It was because she discovered that her mistake that morning had in no way taken from her power to charm. She became animated and sparkling. Gerard looked at her with deepened interest. He was putting her through her paces—trotting her out. In half an hour she had delivered her opinions on everything and everybody

freely, and often in a very shocking manner. Nora was always shocking proper people; but she had a very fascinating way of doing it. It was a naïve, refined rudeness. It suited Gerard's palate just as he sometimes drank wine from the wood—the rough, harsh, yet rich flavour giving a pleasure which the more delicate and older brands failed to excite.

Rachel felt that he was interested in her. Now Rachel cared no more for this "antique cameo," as she called him, than she did for the organ-grinder outside. But she never could attract him, and that piqued her. He always treated her in a languidly polite way, absolutely maddening to a girl of any spirit. There was a tacit understanding between her and Nora that each should conceal the other's indiscretions; and Rachel had already uttered half-a-dozen scandalous falsehoods to account for Nora's absence. But Gerard's increasing attention to the other roused her. She put all Nora's spirits out in a moment, and terribly embarrassed her by remarking—

"There are pleasant walks on the downs in Hastings, aren't there, Mr. Wootton?"

“ Well, I prefer the sea,” replied Gerard, quite unconscious that he was sticking mental pins and needles into the lady he wished to please, whose quick temper turned on him in a moment, and anathematized him as a “nasty, old, conceited frump.” Conceited let it be noted, because she knew he had been pleasing her.

Gerard saw that something was wrong. Nora’s eyes were cast down in that way of hers ; and he continued to talk with the idea of rendering service by covering her retreat.

“ The sea,” he said, “ for me, if one must do anything of that kind. Especially to-day, when there was something to keep one from yawning, and to silence the nigger minstrels. I went down on the beach and saw the regatta.”

Nora for her life could not suppress a slight flushing of the cheek, which Rachel saw in an instant ; and Nora knew she saw, and hated her.

“ Was it good ?” asked Rachel, in the mildest way, aware that she was touching the other on a sore spot, but quite in the dark as to the wherefore.

“Why, yes; there was a special feature about it—a lady in one of the boats.”

“A *lady?*” asked Rachel, with emphasis.

“With Spencer, they tell me,” continued Gerard. “That rather interested me, I must own, for there was a stiff breeze and some danger. She shipped one sea at least to my knowledge, and went very near to being beached among the breakers. It was touch and go, and the girl stood it like—like a man.”

That one word, girl, relieved Nora’s mind immensely. He had not recognised her—he would never speak of her as a “girl.”

“With Herbert Spencer, did you say?” repeated Rachel, marking the colour deepen again on Nora’s cheek. He is not altogether a gentleman, is he?”

This was a mistake. Nora’s blood was up in a moment—she would cower only so long as she was not insulted. She looked Rachel straight in the face.

“I’m sure I should never be ill if *I* went on the sea,” she said, boldly.

Rachel felt that she had gone far enough, and stayed her persecution. Gerard gave a

hundred remedies and preventives he had heard of against sea-sickness. In fact, there was not a thing mentionable that had not been recommended—lying down, standing up, eating to repletion, fasting, alcohol, cold water, &c. &c. It was like the lost tribes of Israel, which had been identified with every nation under the sun—Choctaw Indians to the Jews in Abyssinia, and were just as much a puzzle now as ever. But here Aunt Milly struck in that they had been found at last in the English themselves, whom a very clever gentleman had recently proved from Scripture were the famous ten tribes. She knew nothing at all about the science of races and ethnology, as Gerard clearly demonstrated by half-a-dozen questions. But she was quite sure that this was correct—she felt it.

There are some people who really consider it their duty to believe in any rubbish that can, even by the most obvious sophistry, be connected with the source of their religion.

Gerard repeated his remarks; it kept him over the dining-table, and away from the

drawing-room, where the younger ladies had gone fully fifteen minutes. They were at the piano when he got there at last. Aunt Milly pressed him to play, and he sat down to the keys. In a few minutes Nora was wrapt in listening. He had the gift of music, as men of his taper fingers, and suppressed, sarcastic nature often have, as if in mockery of the emotions they call forth.

She was dotingly fond of music—it always saddened her. It reached her better nature, deeply crusted over as it was in those days. It made her silent. But Gerard did not wish her to talk. He knew better; he preferred that she should sink into a reverie, even if it led her thoughts to another object. A chaste sadness was closer to sympathy. He rather plumed himself upon the progress he had made, though he was morally certain that if she had any partiality at all, she was sure to be dreaming of *the* man now. He did not talk to her. He even exerted himself to amuse Rachel.

But the finest finesse in the human game at whist is continually defeated by the run of the cards.

Wootton's lip curled with intense disgust when Master George was suddenly announced. He knew that noisy, idiotic boy before. A thing of grin and chatter, and raw opinions rudely expressed—all very well in a handsome girl, but in a boy—pah! it was unbearable. He drew in his horns at once, and curled himself up in his snail's-shell of selfishness, prepared to be kicked about metaphorically in the cruelest manner.

This young Greek (Carlyle says all great boys are Greeks) came in original evening costume—namely, knickerbockers and stockings, and jersey, only partially hidden by a dirty jacket, and he held a cap in his hand. He took no notice whatever of the younger ladies, but pounced at once on Aunt Milly, and hugged her affectionately. In fact, he wanted to stay all night; he had come down to the athletic sports and regatta, and had missed the last train by which he could get to Tunbridge Wells. As soon as he had got permission, like a true man, he turned to the more attractive company, and was formally introduced.

Nora brightened up immediately. Gerard, with ineffable contempt of her folly, watched her out of the corners of his eyes making this boy at home. He very soon dropped the angular reserve which he thought was proper in good society; it melted away under Nora's sunny smile of encouragement. A real, downright boy is never so happy as when he can get a handsome lady to listen to his talk. She liked him from the first. He was bright and bold, and rather good-looking—dark eyes and well-cut lips. He was just old enough to make the game sweet without being dangerous. And he had another charm. He was full of chivalry. In ten minutes' time she felt that this boy would go willingly to the ends of the earth, or through fire and water, to please her, without a thought of self or consequences.

Nora moralized on this in her way. What a pity it was that men grew so selfish and calculating when they got older; if they would only be always like George.

They were calling each other by familiar Christian names already. In his overflowing vivacity of description he laid his

hand on Nora's, and she did not withdraw hers. When he saw what he had done, his cheek glowed a warmer tint; but he did not take his hand away. A curious contrast it made—his brown, rough paw on her soft, delicate, taper fingers. After this his voice fell a little, and he spoke in a more tender tone. He felt that he had established warmer relations. Ah, Nora, Nora, what mischief you may be doing! But she looked awfully happy under it. Gerard screwed himself up tighter still in his shell. Thirty years spent in educating down every noble and generous impulse, paring away the heart till it is nothing but rind, makes a man strangely uncomfortable in the presence of anything genuinely gushing.

Master George insisted upon taking her in to supper, despite of Aunt Milly's protest that she was not to humour that rude boy. Somehow they fell in the rear of the procession, and had two or three seconds alone crossing the hall.

"Oh, you *are* a jolly girl," said George, emphatically, with admiration in his dark, bold eyes.

She smiled, and ran her hands lightly through his tangled masses of brown hair. Gerard saw this over his shoulder, and it gave him a twinge.

“I believe you’re jolly enough to sail in the regatta, like that lady did with Herbert to-day. I wonder who it was?—he wouldn’t tell.”

She did not like to have one jot of his admiration diverted to another object.

“Don’t tell any one,” she said. “It was me!”

George kissed her hand in his enthusiasm, never noticing the footman holding the door open for them.

“Wasn’t it a shame, though,” he contrived to whisper to her at table.

“Herbert lost the race after all, because the umpire said he ought to have been at his post before the gun fired, and the Eastbourne skipper found out he was a gentleman, and objected. But I say, Nora dear,” (this was after a pause), “don’t you let anybody know it was you, or it’ll be in the papers, and Herbert isn’t—you know——”

He could not reconcile the idea of this

goddess beside him being coupled even by report with that blotched and bloated man.

Rachel pouted a little upstairs that evening. Nora had engrossed everybody. Nora, sitting before the glass, slowly brushed her wavy hair, contemplating her reflection with lazy satisfaction.

“St. Leonards is such a jolly place,” she suddenly broke out.

Gerard underneath was at that moment asking Aunt Milly if Nora had any fortune. Aunt Milly said she had a very considerable one, and left him to his cigar. He mused for some time. She showed a disposition to become a thorough-paced hand, and she could not meet with a better instructor than himself. On the whole, it would amuse him.





CHAPTER IV.

RERCIVAL, like other young men, when he was in a dilemma always went back to abstract principles to help him out of it, instead of considering things as they stood. When that train had passed out of sight, he pulled up the 28lb. weight which served as an anchor, and seating himself in the stern let the boat drift down the river.

It is all very well to say that man is such a superior creature that the weather cannot or ought not to affect him. But had it been a cold, sharp, frosty day he would have seized at the first resolution he came to, and rushed to put it in execution, merely to keep himself warm; instead of which, the stillness of the autumn atmosphere, the golden haze that spread over the valley, and

the intoxicating sunlight, acted like a gentle narcotic upon him, and he dreamt rather than thought as the boat, left to itself, gradually glided towards the side of the river. The noise of the rushes and weeds against the bottom of the boat, as the slow current carried it over them, was the only sound, save now and then the unearthly laugh of a woodpecker in the dark groves that came down to the very water's edge.

In the first ages of the world, thought or dreamt Percival, in the primeval groves and forests, and under the original blue sky, and when the great sun first shone on men, there was no narrow creed confining the mighty hunter or the peaceful patriarch to one single woman. He had as many as he could keep. Under the Olympian cultus it was much the same, and that was the time when man and woman reached the highest pitch of development, judging from an artistic point of view, which is the true one. Their limbs and bodies were as those of gods compared with our angular, skinny things. Now modern science, beginning with the grand theory of evolution and

natural selection, teaches us that the primary object of every living being is to develop itself to the full of its power. This is the law of nature, and therefore the law of Heaven. Now the question arises, am I, Percival, carrying out the decree of Heaven when I stint my natural abilities, and narrow my mind and affections, by confining myself to one lady ?

All this clever reasoning was in reality to decide whether or no he should pique Nora by pretending an attachment, or setting afloat a scandal concerning himself with some one else ; only this conscientious young man went back to first principles to guide him. The detestably conceited puppy had not a doubt but that to pique her lay in his power. The only question was, should he or should he not ? Hitherto the poor fool had carefully guarded against the slightest approach to flirtation with any one else. Not that, as he now thought, Nora liked him any the better for that. He verily believed she would have preferred him to have been a little more wicked. The truth was, he was afraid of giving her an excuse

for doing the same. If he did, she might claim a similar right. So he had been exceedingly strict with himself. Percival felt quite righteous on this point. He had a right to consider himself injured. It was nothing in the world but that beast of a Spencer she was after. He hated her, and he would go home and write to her.

He wrote, and a precious letter it was. He had a good memory for his own best points, and an equally good one for her faults. It was a kind of "Heads I win—tails you lose" memory. He filled two sheets with a list of all the nice things he had done for her, all the devotion he had shown, and then two more sheets with a carefully compiled account of the offhand things she had said to him, and the ungenerous way she had served him, especially laying stress on her deceptions. He wound up this delicious epistle with two or three sentences telling her how *he* loved her still with the deepest and warmest affection. Then he posted it with his own hand, and walked about all the rest of the day, with a

frown on his forehead, an injured man, entitled to the sympathy of the universe.

When one comes to think about it, it is really very singular how the great majority of people never come to any, even general, idea as to how others feel. They are so occupied with pleasing themselves, and pitying themselves, and thinking over themselves, and analysing their own ideas and impulses, that the notion of deliberately considering what goes on in another's heart and mind never even occurs to them. Yet it is obvious that if they are so wrapt up in No. One, others must be so too in all probability to a great extent. It would almost seem as if it were the very first duty of a rational creature to study the nature of those fellow-beings with which its life is to be passed. But this duty is not taught by the new schoolboards.

Here Percival had been living in the daily interchange of sentiments and ideas with Nora for months at a time, yet he had no more definite conception of her nature than to send her such a letter as this, which,

from the point of view of his own interest, was the most preposterous folly he could have put on paper.

He opened his eyes when he got the following reply, after a day or two. He quite expected a letter by return. He watched for the postman at all three deliveries all one day, and all the next. He was prepared for a long letter, all repentance, and tears, and tender names, and soft endearments. He was even ready to lay down the conditions under which he would again admit her to his esteem. Even when two days passed in silence, he began to think he had been too harsh. Poor girl! He had been unkind—he had hurt her—she was miserable. He would write again and comfort her—tell her he did not really mean all he said. His love for her was so great, he could forgive her anything. His heart was quite touched for her.

In this mood the letter came. It was one small sheet, with a broad margin, written on two sides only in the largest sprawling hand. It was scented, and there was a delicate monogram at the top. It did not smell of

sackcloth and ashes. Percival was indignant in a moment. These were the words written in repentance, blotted with tears—

“DEAR PERCIVAL,—I could not answer your note before, because I have been out so much. Yesterday evening we went to Mrs. Bonner’s, and had such a glorious dance. I must make haste, for Rachel and I are just going for a sail in Mr. H. Spencer’s yacht. Of course I quite expected a *nice* letter from you, so I wasn’t, at all surprised. I hope you have caught a lot of fish.

“Ever yours,

“NORA.”

She had no literary ability at all, and there wasn’t a comma from beginning to end. But she was a clever hand at noticing what would annoy people, and she chose her points with the greatest sagacity.

First of all, it showed that she was in no agitation over his reproaches, because she did not reply at once—she did not put off her amusements by one half-hour to write to him. Then she knew he hated her seeing so many

fresh faces, and he abhorred dancing because other fellows' arms went round her waist. He thought it bold for ladies to join men's pastimes, such as yachting; and as for Herbert Spencer, he had been a sore subject for some time. Then that little touch at the end, showing her acquaintance with his nasty ways, was not of yesterday—she was not at all surprised; and the allusion to the polite way in which he had bidden her good-bye was masterly.

When she read her own letter it quite delighted her; she had half a mind to show it to Rachel, and explain the hidden cuts, but refrained. A true woman is always slow to trust her own sex.

Percival, after he had read this note, went on eating his breakfast as if nothing had happened. He was so completely stunned, that he had no nerves to say or think anything. Or perhaps, as Nora would have said, it was only his nasty way of taking things cool, as he called it; which meant sulking for two or three days, and then telling you of it, instead of flying out in a passion and having it over at once.

Percival took a novel and quietly began reading, composing himself comfortably in his armchair. After the first fifty pages he took the note out again, and studied it slowly. Then he replaced it in his pocket-book, and returned to the novel.

Finally, he read it again, dropped his book, and stared in the fire. He knew very well that he deserved it; that was why he was quiet at first. He was nursing himself up into a rage against her to conceal his failure from himself. His vivid imagination soon brought that desirable result to come to pass. He pictured her floating through the voluptuous dance; her graceful figure swaying in the grasp of that filthy brute Spencer; his great, coarse, blotched face over her bare and beautiful shoulder. He used his jealousy to support him under his humiliation; for she had ruthlessly torn away his vanity, and shown him that he was no one so very particular after all. At that moment it was quite possible that she was sitting in Spencer's yacht, while that fellow explained to her the use of the tiller and the ropes—a pleasure he had always mentally

reserved for himself after they were married. She would have to hold his hand to steady herself with the rolling of the vessel: *his* hand—pah! Percival stamped his foot.

If he had not had his conceit so taken down—which had tamed him a good deal, for a few hours at least—he would not have needed any artificial stimulus to excite him. The barbarian, under the dress-coat and white shirt-front, would have shown quickly enough.

Towards evening he got into a pensive mood: that was the first stage of rehabilitation in the original vestments of conceit. He was so lonely. This great place of his had no mistress; it was unbearable. He had no home. He began writing her a sorrowful letter, but tore it up in a sudden access of self-esteem. If she had her amusements, he would have his. He would go to London by the morning train.

He did not know what to do when he got there. He had a large place of his own up West, but it was just as empty as the other in the country. He dawdled through the parks and into Regent Street, and after-

wards through Pall Mall, but met no one with whom to exchange a word. The vastest city in the world had no one in it. He tried this three times; then he extended his stroll into the City, down the Strand.

In Johnson's time the finest view in the world was down Fleet Street; now it's in the Strand. Listlessly walking with his hands in his pockets, he began to feel conscious of a change taking place in his innermost self. No sensitive organization—no one not crusted over inches thick with stupidity—could ever walk on that pavement, in the midst of those armies upon armies of human beings, each so eagerly and so restlessly pursuing their own personal ends and advantages, utterly oblivious of You and your ends, without a certain gentle quickening of the blood, and an insensible hastening of the pace. There was an irresistible influence emanating from these myriads of delicate organisms which carried him onwards as if upon a stream of magnetic ether.

Percival, who was a great reader, began dimly to call to mind an old Pagan philosophy concerning the Soul of the World,

which represented all things but as the body and organs of this supreme mind or animating centre. He began to have a faint faith in that antique cultus; for here, in the most modern and most unsentimental mud-built capital of the nineteenth century, he recognised the existence of a Soul of the World. His silent, reflective mind in the midst of that bustle and noise, made him resemble a piano in a public room, when the jar of many feet, without the keys being touched, excite the chords to emit a low, vibrating undertone. His head was held higher, he took his hands from his pockets and stepped briskly out, without the least idea whither he was going. But if one tries to walk rapidly in the Strand, that very moment an obstruction is sure to arise. So Percival found a crowd in front of the shop of a confectioner, whose ingenious mind had devised a toy in his window to attract people, representing a marriage procession entering a church, and all on the top of a gigantic wedding cake. Pushing slowly through the crush, Percival suddenly felt his arm seized, and with an instinctive idea

that his watch was in danger clenched his fist to deal a blow, when a voice that he had not heard since leaving public school arrested his intention. Hamilton drew him out of the crowd and down one of those narrow courts, and from thence on to the Embankment, where they exchanged a few notes, and found that neither had anything to do, so they might as well do it together. In a few minutes they were alone in a luxurious apartment high up in a gigantic hotel not far from the Charing Cross Station.

Percival expressed his surprise at finding his friend installed in such a place, knowing him to be wealthy. Hamilton said that when Percival had seen what he had, and come to the conclusion that he had (he was just nine months older), he would be equally glad to get out of the world. • “You see,” he said, “here I am, close to the railway; in ten minutes I can be on my way to Paris, or any other place where the devil particularly flourishes. It took somebody—I never remember poets’ names—a long lifetime to discover that—

‘ Whoe’er has travelled life’s dull round,
Wherever his footsteps may have been,
May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome at an inn.’

But in these days, with the advantages of education, *that* idea occurred to me in less than twelve months. You see I get what I want in an instant. Touch that bell, and all London contains is at my beck and call; and I haven’t the bother of looking after the servants. Nobody questions me; nobody watches me; I pay well, and I do just as I choose. If I furnished my house in P— Square, do you suppose I could do that?” Still Percival could not see why he should bury himself out of society.

Society! he had given up society—he was sick of it. This conceited pup, who was about four-and-twenty, had probably found society sick of him.

Two men under thirty of course could never sit together an hour without discussing the feminine element. Hamilton discussed of them much as a *sarant* would of a new species of ape or kangaroo. It was really quite refreshing to see him rub his sony little hands together, and elevate his

eyebrows, and shrug his miserable narrow shoulders, as he spat out his epigrams. "Really," he said, "it was quite delightful to have some one to talk to whom one could trust not to print one's points in the confounded papers!" Whether it was the *yellow* temperament of the man, or his lack of any physical beauty, or a peculiar magpie bent of mental vision, but somehow or other he had contrived to squint in at the corners of the feminine envelope and spy out all the blots. It was dangerous talk for Percival. The force of it lay in its entire novelty to him. He had never seen it in that light before. In about an hour he began to feel that he had been a fool. To lay his whole happiness at the mercy of a capricious petticoated thing—to expect her to act in a generous, high-spirited manner (this was the greatest folly of all)—to pass months after months in the insane dream that *he* could ever be all in all to her whose mind was incapable even of conceiving such an ecstasy of noble passion. Above all, to waste his time and talents, depriving himself of legitimate pleasures, to gratify *her*

vanity. He had been an awful fool. He was terribly afraid Hamilton had heard something about it. He must conceal it at any cost, and it struck him that the best way would be to willingly enter into any dissipation that the other should propose, just to evince his thorough contempt for the profession of virtue. Hamilton, however, had no dissipation, commonly so called, to propose. He soared far above such vulgarity. But just out of old friendship, and with a view of giving Percival an insight into the upper mysteries, and, in short, entirely for Percival's good, he would introduce him to a circle where narrow prejudices were ignored. There was a lady to be found there who had only one misfortune—she was born in an age that was unprepared for an advanced and divine nature.

This man of wealth and property, who could take a seat in Parliament and help to rule the nation—who could have risen high in the army, or the State, or the Church, simply by the very fact of his existing, and being the focus on which so much interest concentrated, was no better than a procurer

of victims—young, fresh, simple—but always young, if you please, to gratify the vanity of a woman whom he worshipped, and who would have stepped on him with as little remorse as she would on a snail, only it would make her boot in a mess. Each new favoured admirer was an insult thrown in his own wizened little face, and yet he devoted his life to finding them for her.

This is what his intellectual contempt of woman had brought him to. He is a fact, this fellow, and no fiction. Every lady who has reached the age of twenty knows from experience what a depth of degradation the men, that noble sex, are capable of.





CHAPTER V.

THE greatest problem of existence is the production of that wonderful complexion which was no doubt one of the signs by which the immortals were known when they visited earth; not the brilliant eye and rosy neck, but the indescribable pearly-white cheek and blue-black eyebrows, which, whenever she's met down Regent Street, stamps the possessor as of a different race—of the porcelain clay—no common yellow, gritty stuff. They stand out from the herd of brunettes and blondes and intermediates. They are signed with a mark on the forehead, and no one can help looking at them. They are few and far between—precious gems, priceless articles of vertu; to the artistic eye they are a study. Rude, chalky imitations are to be found in

the anterooms of any of the music-halls, or in the promenade at the Alhambra, or anywhere where woman depends entirely for her existence upon her personal appearance—whether to draw idiots to the bar of a refreshment-room, or worse still.

But these are not what we speak of. There are other imitations so close, that at a little distance the resemblance is perfect; these are found in a higher walk of life, and it is a mystery how they manage it. There is one difficulty, however, even feminine ingenuity cannot get over. This complexion, so prepared, wont blush—it's too thick. So they have started a fashionable theory, that it is vulgar to blush. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*: they never think of evil, and don't require to. But the real, original, genuine, divine complexion is beyond all description. It does sometimes occur in a natural state, and its value is enormous. It is a fortune to the owner. She is seized upon by the law of natural selection to fill high places, whether of good or bad repute. The sheer power of her genius, the visible aptitude for delight which she bears about her, com-

pels her to rise. There are only a few large diamonds in the world, and they are so well known that it is impossible for them to remain hidden. There are only a few of these favoured ones born into the world, and they cannot remain to "blush unseen." For these genuine ones can blush, and very beautifully too. It is a study with them. But they are above criticism. It is blasphemy to criticise the gods on Mount Ida. Their drapery of clouds is very transparent 'tis true, but you are not supposed to be able to see through it. Their mortal counterparts are clothed in purple and fine linen; they sleep on eider-down; they are sheltered by sealskin and ermine from the cold; the heels of their boots are high, in token that they scorn to put their feet upon the ground. They are above sorrow and tribulation; care comes not nigh them. They have one other enviable gift—youth lingers with them. Their sun grows warmer and more brilliant as their days pass on. Though they may lose the brilliant tints of youth, these are not missed; they have been gradually supplanted by a mellowness of colour,

making the finished picture more enchanting than the original sketch. Once or twice in a cycle of years there comes a time when the days of sunshine outnumber the days of cloud and cold, which in ordinary years fill up eight or nine months out of the twelve. Then the sky is blue from May till October ends; the bright sun's continued warmth brings out into life millions of tiny beings—insects whose existence depends upon the heat, and who would otherwise have perished in the germ before they were born. The swallows flourish; and in time, when the yellow haze of August comes, strange visitors from far-off lands, beautiful butterflies of gorgeous hues, and birds whose song has been unheard for centuries in our clime, roam through the tropical atmosphere. The leaves linger upon the trees, and will not fall; the swallows gather on the boughs and hold evening parliaments, but cannot decide to begin their voyage. The grass turns brown; but the leaves are brilliant in scarlet, and crimson, and gold, and the soft, warm winds rustle lovingly through them. There is an unwonted colour

upon everything; a mysterious change has happened.

The monotonous green has vanished, and the other hues which it dulled are heightened, filling the eye with scenes of unsuspected beauty. 'Tis true that the streams dry up, and the cattle pant for thirst, and the herbage is turned to hay as it grows, and yields no succulent juices. But the minds of men and women are overcome with the drowsy warmth; and the lovers linger in the shadow of the trees far into the night, whose very stars seem to emit heat with their light. A slumber from labour and toil spreads over the land. The spade falls, the axe lies untouched, the pen drops from the fingers; they leave them for the sound of falling waters, of rustling leaves and singing birds, and the cooling spray of the sea. "We will slumber in the sunshine; it is destiny," they say, eating the lotos. Circe, the great enchantress, is weaving her charms; she joins the sirens, and her rich, low voice "makes heaven and earth drowsy with the harmony."

Such times as these, when summer comes

in April and knows no change to autumn till drear November arrives, happen but once or twice in the life of a man. Such women as these are few as are these years of delicious languor; and like them they are one long summer, one sleepy existence of beauty, a long siren-song. For them men renounce the toil and the thought, the slow processes by which genius builds up its mighty edifice; for them drop the gold from their trembling fingers even at the moment of discovery, when the search of years is all but rewarded; for them the youth deserts his first pure love, to throw himself at the feet of the gorgeous goddess. But, like those years too in this, their beauty withers up all that approach it, drying up the streams of pure emotion, starving the heart with unreal, intangible hopes. Yet they walk on in their splendour as the sun through the sky.

The rich pear on the southern wall of the garden attracts all eyes when it first shows itself among the green leaves. Swelling and growing with the influx of the juices from the tree, its admirers come, and their mouths water as they gaze. But not yet.

Wait. A golden tint spreads itself slowly over the rind; a little red mingles with it, like a faint sunset. In a day it will be ripe. Then there is contention and quarrelling. It is mine, and mine, and mine. Mine, says the master of the garden; but his son cries, "I am the heir; it is mine." There comes a mightier than all—the man of gold; and it is his, and all men hate him; and yet they take him the pear in state, and do lowly reverences before him. Wait yet a little while. The rosy hue deepens, and the yellow fades; touch it softly, tenderly, as it lies upon the porcelain dish. Ah, it is ripening still. Mysterious influences are at work within that delicate rind; let them operate; let the alchemy of nature have its way. The wise man, the true epicure, knows how to stay—how to control his taste, and curb his appetite—till the exact moment when the projection is complete.

But it may be that just at that moment the pear turns rotten within. It is fair still to the eye, and the contention and quarrelling for it continue; but they who taste it shall

find it a soft mass—a pear of the Dead Sea.

And so these women ripen and ripen all their lives. Their high and haughty bearing insults the poor man as they pass, deigning not to cast a look upon him—turning from him as the very offal of humanity. Their rich dress touches the busy, hastening merchant, wealthy but full of cares; and the soft velvet clings a second as it glides against his coat with insolent contempt of all his trouble and toil. Poor worm! poor insect, spinning thy laborious web! look at me. I toil not, neither do I spin; I am the tulip of the garden, the priceless orchid of the greenhouse. All thy wares from India and the Isles, thy purple from Tyre and Zidon, cannot deck thee as I am decked. What a miserable, narrow existence is thine compared with my abundance of life? All thy chests of bullion cannot buy thee eyes such as my glorious orbs, which men look up to as the stars that rule their fate. Go and sit in thy office among thy papers, and lock the door behind thee, and free thy mind one moment from the dust of years; and con-

sider if it is possible for thee, with all thy intellect and strength, ever to arrive at such perfection as I own, without strife, without thought, merely because I *am*?

They who have to earn their daily bread, or the bread of others, remember the few days of passionate love they may have passed years since as a bright speck, an oasis in the desert. If they could but live ever in love, what a high, and noble, and glorious existence, like unto the angels! But these—the Immortals of our day—make love and all its ways their daily bread. How much higher, then, must be their ideal of life—to what a sphere of archangels they must aspire! Yea, verily, their ambition is indeed noble and high.

Oh, Mary Magdalene, let me be preserved from them, and sit at thy sin-stained feet the rather than follow such. They are not of thine order; far from it. They would be the first to cast a stone at thee. They would mock and mouth at thee, and call thee fool, and turn away with bitterest scorn and ineffable contempt. They deem thee a poor and ignorant fool, to believe

that the admiration and the love of men, and the praise which lifts up the heart, are to be bought by such simple means as thine. They look deeper into human nature; they are great students of the heart. They have made a great discovery in that science; it is that the baser passions of men are as feeble threads to charm and hold them compared with the iron chains of their unfathomable conceit.

If a man prides himself upon his ancient name, the antiquity of which is far exceeded by the titles of the dull, inanimate hills around him—upon his long, unbroken descent, trebled in length by the meanest insect that flies—if he pride himself upon his horses, his lands, his diamonds, his pictures, and other trash—shall he not spurn the earth in scorn if he possess such a goddess as I? I, for whom carpets are laid down that I may not dash my foot against a stone? I, for whom titled noblemen and coroneted cash (till yesterday without a name) strive and struggle with princes of the earth? I, the sovereign who smiles this way and frowns that, and deftly preserves the balance of power, which means

my supremacy? The man is intoxicated with the very hope of it. He shall touch the tip of my fingers with his lips, and shall go away, the coals of vanity glowing as a furnace in his heart—he who was created in God's own image. I will permit him to clasp half his fortune in a diamond bracelet round my arm, and he shall just catch the heavenly odour of perfume which dwells in my alabaster skin; and shall go away drunk, reeling, a king in his own conceit—he has had more of me than others.

The most maddening thing of all (I know it well) is my divine calm, my beauty in repose, my undisturbed self-contemplation, as a swan floating on its mirror. They cannot attain to this Olympian *posé*. How wonderful must be the mechanism of the human being which can render such refined apotheosis of idleness possible when the mind is divided with the most complex and innumerable cares. All the diplomatists in Europe have not half so much to think over, to plan, and to foresee, as the busy brain behind that one placid forehead, smooth as polished marble, unmarked with line or

wrinkle, which might be the brow of a sleeping child for all show of care there is thereon.

Many men have many minds, and still more varied and more infinitely divided are the ways in which their vanity shows itself. If it be difficult to please these many minds, how much more so to steady a flight upborne on the breath of innumerable species of conceit? *La haute venerie* of vanity is a chase wherein the slightest mistake, the whisper of a word too much, or the delivery of a glance too warm or too cold by one degree of the thermometer, may plunge the huntswoman in deep sloughs and quicksands.

When there are a hundred men, each believing himself the favoured one, and yet tortured with incessant suspicions, and liable at any minute to unexpected vagaries of temper, it requires no slight command of resource and no trifling foresight to even arrange that no two of them may meet and jar together. It is skating on slippery ice, where a tumble would be worse than the ice giving way, for then there would be scores

to the rescue, a great to do, and fame even out of that. But a tumble would mean an *exposé*, disarranged skirts, destroyed drapery, sneers, and contempt. Yet all the while knowing this, and trembling with the dread of it, it is necessary to keep a smiling face, and to let the figure sway easily with the motion.

Years of such a life as this give these creatures an air which is inimitable. Neither beauty *per se*, nor talent, nor wit, nor wealth, nor even first-class taste in dress, can give such a fatal pre-eminence at first sight as this queenly, goddess-like effect of personal influence, this peculiar indescribable air, this magnetic irradiance of superiority. Let envy and hatred in the feminine breast be never so deep, in an instant a circle is formed round them, a social tradition is created in a moment; it is ill-bred not to admire them, and any one venturing to dissent would be at once voted vulgar. They are the fashion: fall down and worship, or depart into outer darkness.

Every now and then we are told with a sort of astonishment of the immense sums

paid to *prima donnas* for a single night's singing. But what are these petty sums compared with the price hundreds upon hundreds of people in good society, the very uppermost cream, are ready to pay, ay, and to force upon these fortunate creatures, to secure their presence at a ball or at a party. For why? Because if they come it will be a success; all the world will be there. To get one of these in a country house in the autumn would be an acquisition worth thousands. Not that their services can be estimated by filthy lucre. They are paid with fullest adulation, with praise and flattery. The mistress of the mansion is under their feet; she lies down, prostrates herself for her guest to trample on, to spite and vent petty feminine annoyances on—and all gaily, willingly, as a duty she owes to society. The master of the mansion consults her wishes or supposed inclinations, as of some sovereign potentate; he contrives his entertainments to meet her caprices, he waits upon her pleasure. With what reverend care she is tended and fed, and shielded from heat and cold; this precious

picture, which draws the multitude to its side. The visitors revolve round her as their common centre; mothers introduce their daughters to her, with bated breath and trembling hand, as an example to copy, a model to repeat.

In these, her regal progresses, the difficulty is to choose the route, the houses eager for her are so many. She must be careful not to lower her market value by appearing at an inferior place. She is the *prima donna* of society, and the *impresarios* are following her everywhere. When noble lords and dames are ready to lower themselves to any depth of meanness to solicit her attendance, is it to be wondered at that men like Hamilton are to be found, who deem it an honour to be employed by tacit contract to hunt out the promising members of the rising generation, and bring them to her side? Pauline Vietri was the very impersonality of all this. Percival knows her now.





CHAPTER VI.

EVERYTHING had happened to Nora in a blundering kind of way before. Whether it was sitting down to table, or taking a compartment in a railway carriage, or making a visit, or playing a piece on the piano; whether it was ever so trifling or ever so important, it all happened in a blundering way. It does to most people.

There were many inconveniences in it. She got seated next people she disliked, or stepped into a carriage where there was a lunatic under the care of a keeper, or she called when no one was at home, or she chose a piece which she had not played since school, and so made a mess of it. It was only now and then that things came exactly right and she got what she wanted.

But latterly she began to perceive a change. Her luck had taken a turn. Her seat at dinner was always next somebody who could amuse her. Whatever she did came right without any trouble of her own. The things were generally very trifling in which this took place; but they were innumerable, and their effect in the mass very considerable. Trifles make or mar the pleasure of life; that was Gerard Wootton's theory.

Nora grew more high-spirited than ever. Now everything prospered she put her hand to. She was fast becoming insolent with a long series of petty successes. In a dim, ill-defined kind of way, she always associated this pleasant state of things with Gerard. She did not indeed perceive as yet that it was the minute touches of his unseen hand that smoothed her path. He did not obtrude his services. He did so little that it would be difficult to say what he actually did do. He did not attempt to force and override events; he merely sat still, and guided circumstances. If he saw Nora about to do something—say, to step into the wrong carriage—he did not put his arm

out and stay her. He casually remarked that it looked dirty, and she unconsciously walked on and chose another.

His experienced head was never at a loss for a pretext. After a time she recognised still more fully that everything conducted in his presence was sure to be felicitous. If he went with a party the sun was sure to shine and the rain to keep off. She did not analyse deep enough to note that he never started if it was in the least threatening. To her he seemed to command the weather, while in reality he only commanded himself.

In this he had an incalculable advantage over such a child of impulse and passion as Nora. If she was fractious and impracticable one day, he only waited till the next. He never showed his temper. He forgave her all her obstinacy.

This went a great way. Nora was accustomed to say, and to really believe it, that everybody was so disagreeable to her; they were always finding fault, and calling her a bad temper. He never found fault. When Aunt Milly chided her for wilfulness,

Gerard did not openly defend her—but he pointed out several reasons justifying her views. All he was afraid of was, that he should lose the advantage he was gaining by his own fault. He saw with some alarm that he was getting too much interested in her, knowing very well that the more interested one got the more difficult it was to control one's self. It was only while he was completely his own master that he had any chance; everything else was against him. His age, to the eye, was about five-and-forty; the crowds of admirers whom he knew she had had, and would have—the craving after excitement, which he was not young enough nor enthusiastic enough ever to satisfy. He had an uphill game to play; and it was with much misgiving that he found himself hard at it. There was always a hampering dread of failure. And what a failure! He, who had prided himself as being safe from all charms, led captive by this raw country girl, and then cast off.

It was too horrible to contemplate. His gorge rose against it. His conceit could not stand the thought. He positively must

win. What a fool he was to begin. There was one other way in which he slowly wound himself into Nora's daily life.

Away in one of the back corridors of that immense mansion there was a room that had been fitted up by Aunt Milly's brother in the olden time, while she was young and he was hopeful, as a studio. He had taken the idea of it from Retzse's outline sketches illustrating "Faust." He had the ceiling taken down and rebuilt upon a pointed arch springing from the four corners of the room. An immense fireplace for a hearth-fire occupied the whole of one of the walls, with a large carved coat of arms over it. There was a massive oak table in the centre, with two carved oak chairs, such as one sometimes sees in old vestry-rooms, relics of centuries since. Two sides of the room were fitted with bookshelves from the floor to the commencement of the arch. The third side was occupied by an organ—a magnificent instrument—not over large, but rich and full in tone.

This organ had been Nora's awe and delight when she was a child. To sit be-

fore the roaring fire on the rug, burning her cheeks with the heat from the logs, dreaming over a book, while "uncle" played on that organ, was the greatest happiness of her life. It always made her cry, especially if he used the plaintive notes; but she liked that. The deep notes awed her, frightened her—it was thunder humanized into harmony.

The childish liking had long since developed into a passion for music. It was not long before she had sought out the old studio, unvisited for many a year. The cobwebs hung from the arch, and darkened the one small pointed window; there was a melancholy air of other years about it, and Nora felt that she could not sit there alone. So Gerard sat there with her.

He was great on the piano, but he could not play the organ. His dilettante fingers could not manage it; his artificial soul could not inspire it. But he knew all about it, and he could show Nora how to play, that is, how to handle it. With very little instruction she mastered it. Her hand was not a small one, though beautifully shaped

and delicately white. Her arms were long, and strong for a girl. Physically she was made for the instrument.

Gerard sat and listened to her. He thought she was, to some extent at least, showing off to dazzle him. She had forgotten him. She used to begin simply—often with an old, old hymn, the plaintive notes of which, recalling old memories, made Gerard very uncomfortable. Then to tunes, simple still, and almost as old—heart melodies, classic now. Then wilder snatches of opera airs, strangely mingled in one long rhythmic piece. She was fast becoming unconscious of everything but the expression of herself in sound. If Gerard could only have written down and interpreted those hieroglyphics! She was pouring out her heart in music; playing, not from the mind, but from unconscious cerebration. A strange, wild, inner nature was giving itself freedom—oozing out in waves of music, and floating in echoes high up in the Gothic-arched recess of the roof. Oh, Nora, Nora, how little you ever understood yourself—how little any one ever understood you!

Somehow Gerard felt very small and insignificant under this. Her hair worked itself down, and fell in masses below her waist; and as she rose up at last from her seat, and turned round suddenly upon him, he started before her almost unearthly beauty. Her eyes were dilated, her cheeks slightly flushed, her lips parted, her bosom heaving. She walked past him as in a dream, seeing not nor heeding.

He did not follow her. The man was overcome at last. For once, and only once, in that long life of his did he acknowledge to himself that there was a creature in the world superior to himself, and the confession for the moment gave him sharp pain. It is the sharpest pain of all when we see what we are and what we might have been. But it did him no good: he was too hard. In a few minutes he was smoking a cigar in the conservatory, complacently considering how she would look seated at the other end of his dinner-table. She would make a very fine dessert.

Nora was walking then by the sea, trampling her boots into holes on the shingle, but

utterly unconscious of everything but the sound of the waves—listening to the great organ of nature. Fits like these were rare with her, but they showed that there was good metal at the bottom.

This old studio was a great aid to Gerard. Spencer could not stand it. He sat it out for a quarter of an hour, and that was all. Had she been Venus, he would have had an engagement he must keep. Music had no place in the man's soul. Neither had it in Wootton's; but he could wait, and Spencer could not.

Wootton wanted something to get near her with—some method of becoming *en rapport*. This organ afforded it. After she had finished playing she talked freer, and was more unreserved. She treated him without ceremony.

Wootton wished to be her familiar friend; he trusted himself to make it a stronger tie. He was doubtful of one thing though. He was afraid he was getting too common; she saw so much of him; he was always with her. There could be no romance about daily intercourse. Yet he was afraid to go

away, conscious that she had not yet sufficient interest in him to think of him when absent. Conceited as he was, Gerard did not conceal this from himself. He accepted things as they were, acknowledged them, and tried to make the best of them. His faith was strong in time and temper.

Nora began to be a little *distract*. She fidgeted even more than usual. Herbert Spencer was all very well in his way, but he was a dreadfully dull companion. As for Wootton, in counting over her companions like this, she totally omitted to take him into account. If he had only known that, it would have disagreeably confirmed his half-formed fear of becoming too familiar. Somehow or other she found there was something wanting.

Every now and then she found herself thinking of Percival. He was dreadfully disagreeable, but—— No, he was a brute; and she would not remember him. But after another long pause in the conversation with Spencer, she stole a glance at his sodden countenance, and began mentally comparing it with Percival's.

Percival was not handsome. She never thought that (not even in the old days, when she loved him—about three weeks ago); but he was noble-looking and manly. Though he would dress so ridiculously plainly, he always looked a gentleman. This fellow at her side looked like a drayman. Still she hated Percival, of course. She almost wished she loved this man; it would be something to do. If Percival had really loved her, he would not have left her to be bored like this. But she would not think of him.

Upstairs that evening, by way of carrying out her resolution of not thinking of him, she secretly opened her desk and began slowly penning a letter to him. Of course it was full of love? No such thing. It was one long reproach—the very counterpart of that letter Percival wrote to her. She raked up all the disagreeable things he had ever said or done, and told him of them in the plainest language. She pointed out how he had driven her away from him (he had begged and implored her to stay, be it remembered), and how cruel he had been in

stopping so long before he replied to her last note. It was three weeks, and he had not written. Not that she cared. If he did not want to write to her, she did not want him to, and so on. But not a word that could make him jealous—nothing of Herbert Spencer.

After she had sent this to post she came down, and was so lively and in such high spirits all the evening, that Aunt Milly, who was superstitious, said something would be sure to happen, and insisted on her not going near the sea that evening.

Percival's case was improving. If only the place had remained sufficiently dull, and nothing had happened to distract her thoughts, he would have been master of the situation in a week, and a month would have made the fortress capitulate unconditionally. She had nothing to do but think of him.

If that letter only had reached him, all might yet have been well; but, with his usual recklessness, he had left no address at home, and his letters were not forwarded. He never saw it; at least, not till long after.

His silence and supposed obstinate sulki-ness irritated her. She craved for excitement. She wanted Herbert Spencer to let her ride in the flat races just coming off, and actually would have done so if he would have managed it for her. But Spencer, though an awful fool, had learnt one lesson ; it was learnt in an evil school, yet it was good in its way. " Good poachers preserve their own game," was one of the proverbs which in his rude mind supplied the place of thought. He knew very well that if he let her do such a thing all the fellows would be after her. She would draw them by the score. It would fly, as he expressed it, " all over the shop" in a couple of days. There would be much more cunning fowlers after the game, if he let them see where it lay in that open, ostentatious fashion. His chance would be nowhere ; for he had a dim idea that he was a fool, at least off the sea. He cared not a rap about the row there would be. Aunt Milly would kick up a precious shindy : that would be a jolly lark. But, by Jove, if he wanted Lord ——, and Sam ——, and Ted, and all the rest of them after

her. No; he would keep her quiet, and preserve his own game.

Nora made his refusal ground for a desperate quarrel. She abused him in a dreadfully vulgar way for a lady. She called him a fool at last.

All the rest did not hurt him in the least. He did not mind being abused; but this last went right to the quick. The poor fellow knew he was a fool, but to be told of it by her whom he half worshipped and half revered as a superior being was too much. He had had a hope before that she either did not see his folly or would put up with it. It made him wretchedly miserable. The pitiless tormentor at his side saw he winced, and followed up her advantage. She pointed out to him what a donkey he always made of himself, and then to pretend to be wise of a sudden and prudent. There, it made her mad, idiot that he was!

This was a shocking bad thing for Percival's interest. He would probably have been delighted, as we always are, with events that we in our blindness believe to be for our good. But it was a bad thing

for him nevertheless. This quarrel distracted her attention. It amused her.

She sulked and played with Herbert for a week, and in that week a great deal of mischief was done in a quiet, noiseless kind of way.

He bore it all wonderfully well. He did not get out of temper; on the contrary, he was rather more polite in his clumsy way. This made her worse. She almost boxed his ears once for being so stolid. She told him she hated him instead.

Herbert had broke in a good many horses in his day, and this experience enabled him to bear it a little more philosophically than he otherwise would have done. They all pranced, and kicked, and bit, and showed off their tempers at first; but wait a bit. All you had to do was to keep your eye on them, and wait.

But somehow this horsey experience of his did not seem to quite apply in her case. She sulked, and would not speak to him.

Next day, meeting Rachel on the parade, he stammered out a message for Nora. She

had made him so miserable, he confessed, that he must go away for awhile and try his yacht, which was up at Rye. Like many an abler man before him, he fled to the sea to soothe his wretchedness, for he really was as unhappy as such a drink-sodden, God-forgotten brute could be.

Nora, when she heard this, forgot all about Spencer, and raved about the ingratitude and disagreeableness of the men, meaning Percival all the time. She would have nothing more to do with them. All the while she believed Herbert would be back next day. But he was not. Watching and waiting for him, and eagerly inquiring if any one had heard of him, passed away several more days without much thought of Percival.

Percival never would have agreed that it was so, but his own interest would have been much better served if he could have got Spencer to live in the same house with Nora. She would have thought as little about him as she did of that "Old Wootton." Percival, of course, would never have consented; but it was very foolish of him at

any rate to leave her no memento of him but that precious letter of his. She kept studying that letter more night after night, weighing every word, and imprinting every sentence on her memory. It had just the opposite effect to what was intended. Her resentment at the charges it contained made her attribute every one of the ill qualities it described as existing in her, to him. After awhile she really began to believe that Percival was as disagreeable as he had represented her in this letter. The more she thought this, the riper she grew for any act of rebellion against the hold he still retained over her affections.

The monotonous life at St. Leonards made it still worse. There was no one now but that "Old Wootton" to amuse her, and he was nobody.

"Old Wootton," nevertheless, was slyly sliding his hand pretty deep into the pie.

His idea was to gradually attain a powerful influence over her. He did not flatter himself that he was capable of exciting love; neither did he particularly care about that. Looking into the future, he

saw that the one thing needful was the power of influencing her. He felt certain now that he was slowly acquiring that influence. The worst of it was, that he could not stop in that house without being constrained to talk a good deal to Aunt Milly.

Whenever was there anything pleasant not overshadowed by the presence of a bore? And yet without them it seems impossible to do anything. Without Aunt Milly he never would have had such opportunities.





CHAPTER VII.

AUNT MILLY'S brain was not very large, but it was big enough to contain an idea. It is questionable whether even Professor Ferrier with his electrodes could have ever excited, even with the most scientific manipulation, two ideas in her head. That one notion had been there ever since she came to years of discretion (facetiously so named). It was that it was her mission to marry people in whom she took an interest.

This is not an uncommon affection of the feminine intellect.

The first ten years of her early life were spent in complex manœuvres, having for this object the union of her brother, on whom she doted, with an eligible person.

It is a singular fact in physiology that

if a woman is neither very beautiful nor very attractive, nor in any way likely to get married herself, she is pretty sure to dote on her brother. On the other hand, it is a tolerably good indication of weakness in the head, and general feebleness of character, if a woman is so absurdly fond of her own nearest relation.

Ned, however, was very perverse. He never could see that Milly was acting for his good. At last he went and did it. He married a governess—at least he ran off with her, and married her in future years. This dreadful catastrophe upset poor Milly's mind, which was never particularly well-balanced. They called it hysterics—in reality it was monomania. She got into a habit of taking immensely long walks into the country and coming back with a handful of primroses or red-robins, or some other childish wild flowers, as symbols of her lost hopes.

This was very practical and sensible at thirty-five. But after awhile she found religious consolation necessary. The less said on that point the better. It is sickening to see the advantage which certain professors

of religion will not scruple to take over these half-witted creatures, "leading them to Jesus" *viâ* money subscriptions.

The original idea of uniting people together in holy matrimony had never entirely left her head. Recent circumstances restored it to much of its vigour.

Gerard Wootton was perfectly well aware of Aunt Milly's weaknesses. It was one of his pet theories that a man should always study to discover the foibles, and especially the hobbies, of his acquaintance. If not wanted at the time, a day would be sure to come when this knowledge would be power. He said that every living being over twenty had at least one secret, of which they were mortally in dread. It might, when looked at by a third party, seem a ridiculously absurd secret, nothing at all to be afraid of others knowing. But there it was, and none the less powerful for being ridiculous over their own imaginations. Now, if one could only fathom that secret, one would have anybody one liked to select in one's power. Theoretically this was easy enough—practically it was exceedingly difficult.

Gerard had devised a plan nearly as perfect. People, he said, never concealed their hobbies. Study them; they let you into the inner man.

It was not at all unlikely that the secret was connected with the hobby. Gerard once thought of writing a play—"Every Man has His Secret."

Aunt Milly's foibles and hobbies required very little study—she displayed them so openly that any one could see them. But it was not every one who saw them that conceived the idea of making use of them. The dormant match-making proclivities of her mind only required a very tiny spark to ignite again and burst into full combustion.

Gerard had thoughts of applying this match himself. He thought it over in the conservatory with the aid of a good many cigars. It looked promising. She thought so highly of him; she would be sure to take the thing up. Yes, Aunt Milly might be depended upon. Gerard, however, was a practical diplomat. One of his rules was this: when you have arranged your plan, and are sure of its succeeding, then quietly

abandon all idea of putting it into execution for a day or two. Occupy those days in supposing that your plan has succeeded, and in creating the consequences in your mind's vision.

He was doubtful upon one point. Aunt Milly was so indiscreet. If she let out that he, Gerard Wootton, wanted to marry (he winced as he thought of marriage) Nora, Nora would be sure to take the thing awry. She might even laugh at the idea—that would be the most fatal of all things. Girls often married men they hated; but never those who appear ridiculous in their eyes. It was very risky. Aunt Milly was so enthusiastic. Nora, if she saw them in league to force her inclinations, would be the very one to turn round and kick clean over the traces. He had noted her temper. The only method of getting on with her was to let her suppose she was having her own way. Still he was greatly tempted to enlist Aunt Milly. He got quite irritable over the point—hesitation always makes a man irritable.

It was a custom in the house that the

girls should go to bed first, leaving the two elders up to talk over what they pleased alone. As a rule, Gerard contrived to slip this duty, which involved family prayers, by pleading indisposition. But in this undecided state of mind he remained one evening. They sat for a little while in silence. Gerard opened his lips twice, and twice closed them undetermined. If he had not been so sure of securing an ally, he would not have hesitated a moment; he would have made the attempt.

Aunt Milly suddenly snatched up her needles and began knitting. This was a sign of a long "babble," as Gerard called it. She was on him like a flood. It was all about marriage—that holy institution. He really began to have a half-formed fear that she was about to propose to him. (She was not *his* aunt.) She spoke so feelingly of compatible people, and the desirability of an eligible selection. There was not a point connected with the contract that she did not touch upon, and enlighten him as to her opinion. Above all things, it was proper that young people should have elder ones to

choose for them. She had seen the wretchedness that too often ensued from allowing children to have their own way. Now there was Nora——

Gerard's heart fluttered; he began to think that, after all, she was coming round to the very point he wished. That dear child was going the wrong road fast—the broad road that leadeth to destruction. She required the guiding hand of a good and upright man to lead her into the straight and narrow way. Gerard drew himself up. Aunt Milly had so often given him this character, that the great humbug for a moment really believed he was a good and upright person. Nora was wilful; she required a firm hand to restrain her. She was irreligious, or at least irreverent. Gerard promised himself taking her to church twice on Sundays. She was too decided in her opinions, and too determined in enforcing them. Gerard thought he could mend that. What was wanted was a man whose whole life would be an example to her; example was so much better than precept. Gerard was conscious of his rectitude of purpose. He

had never been so genuine a humbug as he was that night. He fully believed he really was all that Aunt Milly described.

She went off then into settlements. Nora was rich, very rich. Gerard felt far above filthy lucre. There was Williamston Manor, and Buckton, and Broadrip, and Manley. It was far too much for any girl of her age. And entirely in her own hands, too; not a soul could touch a penny, or prevent her extravagance. And she an orphan, too; and nobody but a poor, feeble creature like her Aunt Milly to advise her. Gerard felt moved even to tears at this mournful picture. If care was not taken she would become the prey of some fortune-hunting adventurer. Gerard's breast swelled already with manly indignation.

She felt that the time had come when something must be done to secure the dear child's future. He fully agreed with her. She was sure she could rely on her old and valued friend Gerard to assist her? Of course, to the very utmost of his power. She had not come to this decision hastily; she had revolved it in her mind many days,

and prayed for instruction. All he wished was that she would come to the point. She thought at last that light had been vouchsafed to her. The finger of Heaven was manifest in it. Gerard wondered what on earth the finger of Heaven had got to do with him; he would rather keep clear of it on the whole.

He was getting horridly impatient. The Stanley estate almost surrounded Nora's; the land was interlocked in many places. What the devil had the Stanley estate to do with him? thought Gerard. There had been a feud between the families for many generations. He hoped secretly it would last for ever. Family feuds were much to be deplored—she believed that the whole earth would have been at peace, and the millennium here long ago, if it had not been for these unfortunate disagreements. It was the duty of all true Christians to put an end to them.

Now here was Nora, the last of her family, and here was young Stanley. Gerard tried to shut his eyes to what was coming; it was no good. That wretched old woman

had beguiled him into listening to a matrimonial scheme between Nora and Theodore Stanley; and she would go on, taking his silence for granted. Theodore was such a nice, loveable young man. He was more than suspected of an attachment already—only he was so conscientious and so gentlemanly he did not like to intrude. A perfect gentleman, she assured her dear and valued friend, was Theodore Stanley, and so good! No horse-racing, and all those horrid things. He had rebuilt Stanley Parish Church at his own expense. An honour to the county. He was already an Under-Secretary of State. No, she was wrong; he would be when the Opposition came in. It was an even match so far as money went. And so on *ad infinitum*. It would be so delightful to arrange the meetings, and settle the details; and to heal the ancient feud, quite romantic, you know. And you could be best man, Gerard!

“I’ll do my best, be sure,” he forced himself to say, anxious to get out of it. He took his collar off as quick as possible when he did get upstairs, and flung the window open. A man never recognises that he is a

humbug until he has fully believed in himself and been undeceived. Gerard had fully believed that Aunt Milly's description of him was accurate. The blundering old woman, with her hateful babble, had exposed the humbug to himself; and all the while he had been deliberating whether he should secure her assistance or not, she had been plotting for some one else—this Theodore Stanley, idiotic name.

Gerard slowly and carefully took off his wig. He was really fifty-five, and wore a luxuriant one. He felt safer if he took his front teeth out at night; he had heard of their being swallowed by accident. He generally painted his moustache and whiskers overnight; the composition made them look blue for the time—in the morning they were magnificently black. Those wrinkles under the eyelids had to be refilled, and the complexion touched up a little. Fellows wondered why Wootton never would have a valet. He was obliged to perform these duties before the glass; and a hideous scarecrow he looked now his conceit and his false beauty were taken out of him.

He caught himself wondering what Nora would think of his transformation, supposing them married. She would be furiously indignant. He was obliged to own to himself that in all probability she would burst into inextinguishable laughter. He fancied he could hear her now. She had a full, ringing laugh. He ground his teeth, or rather his chops, as he thought of it. The mean, conceited, artificial old fellow turned against her inwardly. He blamed all his discomfiture to her. Not that he would pause in his object; she should be his, if any amount of ingenuity could bring it to pass. If not, well, he had sufficient cleverness he rather thought to spite her, and make her unhappy. She should not have the man she wanted. He consoled his conceit in this way, and put the light out.

Nora and Rachel at that very moment were mutually agreeing that the men were the most deceitful, detestable, disgusting creatures that ever existed.



CHAPTER VIII.

NORA remembered the re-opening of Stanley Church very well ; it was her favourite church. It ought to have been a cathedral, she declared. The artistic beauty of the place strongly affected her emotional nature. It was questionable whether there was much religion in Nora's pleasure in frequenting that edifice. Certainly, as Aunt Milly said, there was a deficiency of reverence. Nora was very ill-behaved in church. She had been known to scribble on the flyleaf of her hymn-book ; she never could sit still, and never had the remotest idea where the text was. Yet she was fond of this old church. Old it was, beyond the possibility of discovering its exact date ; like those centenarians who cannot find their baptismal registries, there was no record of its original foundation.

The Rev. Prebendary, minister of that parish, had a theory that it had been built in the first place on the site of a Roman temple; and he was especially fond of showing strangers the proofs which were conclusive in his mind. First of all, there was an old Roman road, which, if restored to the map, would run right through the whole length of the principal aisle, leaving St. Catherine's Chapel on the left hand. In St. Catherine's Chapel there was a stone built into the wall, which had a peculiar projecting ledge, and which he declared was nothing more than a Roman altar, used as a corner-stone.

Then, when they were enlarging the Seton vault, which ran right under this stone, the workmen found a Roman coin—at least, the Rev. Prebendary declared that it was Roman. To ordinary eyes, the metal was so corroded that neither inscription nor stamp was visible. No one, however, could contradict the rev. gentleman, whose learning was notorious; no one could say positively that there was *not* a temple at that place. The Rev. Prebendary's very voice carried authority

with it; it was sharp, loud, distinct, permitting no cavil. It agreed with his long, pointed nose, and heavy chin, so heavy that it overbalanced a good forehead, and made it appear too small.

This decided old gentleman had one object in life. That object was Stanley Church. He dedicated his life to it. Some people said that was why he did not marry, in order to have more time. The Rev. Prebendary, however, was known by his intimate friends to have other views on marriage. It might be permitted for the lower clergy, but not for the priest—not for such as he. In other words, he was an exceedingly High Churchman; which, joined with his notorious decision of character, and determination to have his own way, made some irreverent Dissenters dub him “The Pope,” which stuck to him for life.

It was funny, though, what an amount of respect and adulation this disagreeable old fellow somehow got. It is a curious phenomenon that when everybody dislikes a man, they all join in praising him. The local newspaper spoke of him in the highest

terms ; at the local meetings and local dinners he was always coupled with the toast of the clergy, and lauded to the skies. Everybody detested the idea of restoring Stanley Church, because of the subscriptions necessary ; and yet everybody praised the Rev. Prebendary for his perseverance in carrying out the idea, which cost in the end some four-and-twenty thousand pounds.

Nora was awfully afraid of this fellow ; yet she necessarily caught something of his tone, and looked down with him with infinite contempt upon the "low" people. But she was enthusiastically enraptured with the idea of restoring the dear old church. She insisted on giving a very heavy sum. To do the Rev. Prebendary justice, he did not snap at the cheque as certain of his brethren would have done. He called on her, and explained that it was too much, she would injure herself. But Nora was determined ; she insisted upon the draft remaining at the figure she had written. The old gentleman was exceedingly gratified, but he declared that at the end of the year he should call on her again, and if he saw the slightest

symptom of regret he would restore the cash.

Nora was very glad to get rid of him. She would have given twice as much where her emotions were concerned, and the old church was somehow woven into her very being. She remembered going there Sunday after Sunday with poor papa, when she was a very little child, and spending all the time in gazing about. She remembered looking up at the roof, and being afraid that the great heavy beams would fall upon them some day.

Poor papa and dear mamma were both there always now in the family vault in the northern nave. No sum of money was too large to decorate their resting-place. At the re-opening she did not sit in the old pew. They sent her a ticket for a place right in the front, and she went there wishing to hear the dear old bishop better, who was coming. His voice was feeble, poor old man, and could not be heard far down those grand aisles. She took her seat in that confusion of mind which always results from the first entrance into large assemblies under

unusual conditions. But soon the old place grew upon her in its renovated splendour. They had done it judiciously. Strictly speaking, they had restored nothing. They had only removed modern erections which obstructed the view. They had taken off the whitewash, and exposed the mediæval painting of St. Catherine and her wheel, with a long legend in black letter. The endless rows of scutcheons overhead, the arms of the mighty dead who slept beneath, had been painted in their original colours. But the banners—the ragged, tattered flags that had fluttered in the battles of three hundred years ago—were there still; not even dusted. They had put some more coloured glass in the windows, but it was glass that had been preserved in the strong-room in the vestry ever since the time of the iconoclastic Puritans; nothing new. The peculiarity of this ancient glass was not only its hues, but the natural faces which the artist had represented. They were faces such as might be met with any day in the street. The result was that they looked real. The face of the Duke of

York, just opposite her in the window, seemed like that of an old friend, parted from years ago—familiar, and yet new. They had built up a grand new organ, but it did not obscure anything. It was perpendicular, reaching nearly to the roof; this arrangement enabled the view up and down the aisles to be preserved intact. The chant of the surpliced choir, the intoning of the service, the mellow light from the pictured glass, subdued Nora's soul, till tears dimmed her eyes. The rolling of the deep notes of the organ through the aisles and pillars sounded like the distant sea, which broke on the shores of Galilee eighteen hundred years ago. If she could only see the figure which, standing there, stretched out its arm, and bid those restless waves be still! It was in this mood that she looked across the space towards the carved stone pulpit. They had placed Sir Theodore Stanley (for he was a baronet) right in the front, under the very shadow of the pulpit; but there was no pew before him. He knelt on a rough cushion in full view, looking upward with his hands clasped. It was an oval, delicate

face, not unlike the Madonna's—almost too refined for a man—with regular classic features and chiselled nose. His forehead was low and white, covered with thick, short curls of light chestnut hair, and his parted lips were beautifully curved and cut. His deep-blue eyes seemed full of a dreamy emotion, and his slight figure to be drawn upwards with the swell of that glorious music. He really was exceedingly handsome; and in that mood she thought, for the time at least, that no one ever could be more so. She could not keep her eyes off him. She forgot the service and the occasion in watching him. She noted the unaffected ease and grace with which he went through the various changes of posture; and appreciated it the more because he was obviously placed in a very trying position in front, and in view of the whole congregation, close to the episcopal eye. There was an air of extreme refinement—of the gentleman of gentlemen—about him, which irresistibly won on her. Perhaps the knowledge that he admired her had something to do with it. Not exactly the knowledge either,

for these two had barely spoken, and then in the most formal way, at balls and other places where they met by accident.

But Nora had a secret feeling that his eyes were on her. An instinct told her that his sympathies were with her. It was curious, but Percival never showed any jealousy of Sir Theodore, sharp as he usually was. Perhaps it was because Nora, although she sometimes thought of him, did so in a very pure manner. He was a man she felt whom it was impossible to flirt with.

Perhaps, on the other hand, Percival knew that he could trust Sir Theodore. He knew him as extremely conscientious—utterly incapable of attempting any interference with another's views—far too full of refined pride ever to condescend to such an attempt. No, there was no danger from that quarter. Percival even joined in the praises of Sir Theodore, though he invariably found something in every one else Nora spoke of which detracted from their worth. It might be that he unconsciously thought he should hide his jealousy, and obtain a character for fairness by doing so. It did

not do him much good in the end though. There came a time when Nora excused herself to herself by saying that Percival liked him. Percival did not object.

How impossible it is to foresee in what sense our words will be interpreted by others! Still the impression made upon her mind was very faint. It was like the first stage of a photograph on glass. It requires to be held up to the light in one particular way before the picture is visible. It is not for some time, and until after other processes, that a strong likeness is obtained. There was a dim reflection in her mind, and that was all.

It was an unfortunate thing for Percival that Herbert Spencer was fretting away his time in his cutter, dodging in and out the French coast. When Nora had companions she could pass the time away rapidly enough without him, and without thinking of him very much. That did him no harm. She did not fall desperately in love with them. But now there was no one but Rachel and that "Old Wootton," it went very hard with Percival. She did not abuse him

now. She did not call him everything detestable under the sun. She had worked herself up into believing that she really was shamefully ill-used, and the first passionate temper was being supplanted by a sullen hatred. Hatred advisedly, for it is a peculiarity of the feminine mind that it can hate at the same time that it very deeply loves. She felt that she could do anything to spite him, and make him see that she was as independent as he was. She would show him that she could do without him. This was not always so. One day she had a violent fit of repentance, and accused herself of being cruel to him. She cried half an hour in secret upstairs, and got very red about the eyes. Then she took out her desk and wrote him a second letter. This was just as full of love as the other was of gall. She had been capricious, unkind, thoughtless. It was all her fault. She was miserable without him; why did he not come to her? What should she do to show him how much she loved him? She would come back at once if he liked, and he would be with her every day.

They would go out fishing together as

they used, or wander about the dear old woods, and she would gather woodbine for him ; she remembered what flowers he was fondest of. Dear, dear Percival. She was so lonely and miserable. Did he know that while he was trying to persuade her not to go away from him, and all the while that she was so nasty and unkind, she was admiring him—he was so handsome, and so on. Nora was very pensive for two or three day after posting this letter. She was quite sure that an answer would come now. But it did not. This letter, though, did reach Percival. The butler, knowing of the engagement between his master and Miss Nora, and well acquainted with her handwriting, saw that there were two letters now from her waiting for him. At a venture he took the second and sent it enclosed in a large envelope, with a note of his own, to one of Percival's friends in London, asking that it might be forwarded if his address was known, and if not returned ; so it reached him about a week after date. And he read it with peculiar emotions—which see presently.

By this time Nora was defiant again. He had deserted her then for good. She give way!—not she! She would tear him out of her heart. No, that was not needful; she never really cared about him; so she told Rachel. She was always very extravagant about dress, and now, just to show that she did not care, she went in for more expense than ever. Aunt Milly was shocked.

“Ah,” said Nora to Rachel, “she’d have her revenge, she’d flirt with every fellow she met with, and then turn them off and sneer at them; she’d serve the disgusting lot out. Only let her just get a fellow who was really fond of her, would not she lead him a life! She’d make him wish himself a dog very soon. The conceited idiots thought they could do anything with a girl, they were so superior. Only wait till she had a chance. She knew she was handsome. She was not vain, but she only had to look in the glass to see that; besides, everybody told her so. She would not want for fellows, they would soon be round her. She knew exactly how vain they were; would not she flatter them! Pooh! it made her ill to think of them.

She would do her hair in twenty different ways, till it was charming. Percival liked her to dress well. She would spend all her time over dress, just to attract the men."

Rachel rather sympathized with her on the whole, though she could not repress a little sigh of envy as she gazed on this magnificent creature, who, as Percival said, never looked so handsome as when she was in a temper.

Aunt Milly detested Percival because he laughed at her tracts. She enlisted Gerard firmly on her side by telling him of Nora's engagement with Percival.

Wootton hated the name in a moment. Anyhow, he would keep her from her own choice—that would be something. If he could get her engaged to this Theodore, she might fall to the ground between two stools and be glad to sit on *his* furniture.

As Aunt Milly said, Nora had been left too much alone with that young man; she had had no freedom of choice. Thrown much together, they had naturally become fond of each other. It was only superficial affection—only on the surface. She should now see others, she would soon forget,

and enter into the views of her elders. Gerard agreed cordially. It was only superficial affection. It would be a pity that she should throw herself away like that !





CHAPTER IX.

TH E certainly was a great improvement upon her more recent companions. Not that any one could be more polite than "Old Wootton;" but in some way or other he wanted the ring of true metal, which Sir Theodore had. Then he was young, and very handsome. The only thing was, she was rather in awe of him. He bore the reputation of being such a good young man. Herbert Spencer had a still more notorious reputation the other way, but she was not afraid of him.

It was difficult to discover in what way Theodore marked her out. He was just as polite to Rachel and Aunt Milly; perhaps he was a little more polite to Aunt Milly than to any of them. Nora tried to remember, after a day had been passed in his

company, if he had said or done anything that particularly pointed at her, and failed. Yet there was a not altogether unpleasant consciousness in her mind that these visits were intended for her—not altogether unpleasant. Sir Theodore was a baronet. That was not a high title, but it was well known that his descent was far older and purer than scores who could show a coronet, and that very fact gave him an entry into the highest circles of society. He was a rising man politically, though on the wrong side, being a Liberal, while Nora had been nursed in all the traditions of Conservatism.

It was very curious how, in about a fortnight's time, Nora's opinions on Government underwent a complete and sudden change. She was notorious for these rapid conversions. She ran out against the slowness, the antique ideas, and the ridiculous conceit of the Conservatives. There were quite as good men on the Liberal side—quite as well descended. Only, as was always the case with Nora, she went a great deal too far. She was a mild Liberal at first; but in ten hours after a little angry

controversy with conservative Rachel, out of very contradiction she ran into an out-and-out Radical. The land ought all to be divided in tiny morsels; down with Church and State!

Rachel smartly asked what would become of Stanley Church in such an event.

“Don’t be stupid,” said clever Nora.

Then Sir Theodore’s great grandfather’s uncle’s father had fought a duel in the Lowlands about five generations ago with a member of Nora’s family, and had shot him dead. The duel cast a halo of romance round his head. Here was the descendant of that cruel murderer, his pride subdued, coming to solicit the honour, &c. It had hardly come so far as that yet. Somehow she rather avoided thinking of the inevitable end.

At the same time it was difficult to keep herself up to her purpose of serving the men out. She felt that Theodore could not be made jealous by her flirting with other fellows. He was not the sort at all; he would not understand it. He would ask for an explanation or some other horrid

thing; perhaps say adieu at once. It would not do to risk that as yet.

Nora was certainly a young heathen—a very wicked sinner. But put yourself in her place, my dear—of course you would never think of acting in this way. But really there were excuses. A handsome, earnest man like Theodore always at one's heel is a great temptation. Did she care about him in her heart? That's another question altogether.

They did not do it violently these two. It was a very quiet flirtation. She hugged herself with the idea that, when she had thoroughly got hold of him, she would let him know. Only wait.

But the longer she waited, and the more she got hold of him, the more difficult it became. She really began to be afraid that he would get hold of her. There was something about the man which gave him an influence louder and more determined men would have tried to obtain in vain. He was almost too quiet. It was impossible to make him demonstrative, give him as many opportunities as one liked. But in some

way he managed to make her feel that he *meant* everything he said and did. So many fellows were polite, and did and said nice things; but all the while it was tacitly understood that nothing was really meant. Sir Theodore was quite as nice in his quiet way, but then all he did was evidently genuine.

Honesty is sometimes the best policy even in love. Nora had gone through so much of the humbug of the thing that that plain, simple admiration went further with her, even as being so novel, than the most careful manœuvring. She began to feel that she should not like him to find fault with her. Those clear blue eyes had a look in them which made her rather uncomfortable when she thought of such a possibility. Not that there was temper in them, or an attempt to put one down by superiority. She would have felt that it was not him, but the spirit of something or other—of the Church or of morals—that was gazing out at his eyes and reproving her.

She certainly was on her guard a great deal more than formerly. She was quieter, not

so opinionated or insolent. She thought before she said or did anything.

“Didn’t I tell you he would improve her?” said Aunt Milly, triumphantly, to Gerard.

Nora did not quite realize this slow change in herself yet. She began, it is true, to have some faint misgivings at times as to how all this was to end. An off-hand jilting of Theodore was out of the question. He was not the man to serve like that. She would have felt so humiliated had she done that. He gave her insensibly a higher standard of minor morals. Nor could she make up her mind to contemplate the idea of getting rid of him yet. She had nothing else to do. Percival, Percival, why did you leave her in idleness?

After all, there’s a good deal in dress. Percival dressed nohow—he was monotonous in his clothing. Spencer was thoroughly sportsmanlike; that was jolly enough in its way. Wootton was always a dandy; the old fool, as Nora expressed it rudely to Rachel. Theodore, on the contrary, was always dressed to perfection. His clothes were a little subdued.

There was nothing loud or fast about them, but they were fashionable to the last degree. There was a refined elegance about them. Nora caught herself watching him as he walked or stood, always in an attitude of graceful ease, always faultlessly attired.

There was a great deal in this. It did not strike the mind and take the heart captive at once, but it gradually made its way. The impression deepened daily. Let them be never so beautiful, so dear, so accomplished, so ethereal, there is always a spice of the milliner in a woman's nature. That, of course, is only a spiteful man's notion, but it is true. Theodore, too, was no clothes-horse. He was spare and slight, but a very good figure. His hands were small and white. Now Nora had always run out against small and white hands in a man. It was so effeminate, so girlish. She liked a hand not too big, so as to be coarse, but strong, and muscular, and brown (like Percival's she meant).

But this, of course, was different. Theodore really had a very pretty hand. When he reached her a flower in the conservatory,

his hand among the foliage and the flowers was quite artistic. Nora declared to Rachel that it was a painter's hand—it was the hand of an inspired genius. What a pity he devoted himself to those dry politics!

This was so far true that he could sketch very well, especially if it was anything ridiculous. He had the faculty—this moral, conscientious, silent politician, of presenting the absurd side of a thing in crayon to perfection. He would have been invaluable on a comic journal. It was one of the strange contradictions of nature. With a deep reverence for the beautiful, a decided *spirituelle* bias, this man had only the power, so far as reproducing was concerned, of caricaturing.

Nora was delighted when she discovered this new talent in her toy. She kept him at it incessantly. She took him down on the beach, and made him draw the curious people they found there. She bought an album, and pasted his sketches in them, and showed them to everybody as “so clever, you know.” This was very dangerous for Theodore. It was no slight matter to be in

almost daily contact with such a glorious creature—no slight peril to his self-command. But when she praised and applauded what he had hitherto rather considered a defect in his organization (this faculty for punning with pencil), it grew serious. Mortal man could not stand such flattery.

Sir Theodore had only accepted Aunt Milly's invitations with a proviso in his own conscience. He knew that Nora had been engaged to Percival. He would not for worlds have had it said that he was a rival; that he wished to take away another man's love. Such an attempt was despicable in the extreme. But when a man is really in love as Sir Theodore was, he generally contrives to hear a good deal about the admired individual. He knew that Percival had left the place; he knew that Nora was at St. Leonards; and he felt by instinct that they had parted. Whether for good or no was the question. When weeks went by, and lengthened into months, it really looked as if his secret hopes were not ill-founded. Good as he was, he could not help feeling a little brighter.

Then came Aunt Milly's pressing invitations ("Old Wootton" managed them for her successfully in his serpent way). Even then this model young man, who by-the-bye really was anxious to act uprightly, only came, as we said before, with a proviso in his own conscience. He was only to press his case when he was certain that Percival had entirely left the field.

Now, when he had passed some weeks in Nora's companionship, and when he could not fail to see that his presence was not disagreeable to her; when not a word was breathed by any one of Percival, and his name never so much as mentioned; when, too, he became conscious that Aunt Milly, Nora's natural adviser, was favourable to him—the man might naturally be excused if he awoke to the idea that the road was clear, and that he might quite conscientiously walk over it. Once thoroughly imbued with this conclusion, and Theodore began to let in other ideas, long kept resolutely at bay as unworthy of him. Was this Percival worthy of her?

He had heard a good deal about Percival.

With all his Church prejudices and deeply-rooted religious nature, he was nevertheless fair enough to admit that Percival's contempt of religious ceremonial was not in itself a proof of depravity. But he had heard other things about him—things which to his idea of the feminine sex seemed worse than profanation. Percival had a curious reputation for one or two little exploits in his earlier days, which, to a man of Theodore's purity of life and manners, seemed absolutely wicked. He was even doubtful whether Percival was altogether a gentleman. He had known him behave in a very rude manner. He had seen him extremely excited on several occasions. He had even heard reports of his having had a stand-up fight. Such goings on were very "low."

The idea of Nora tied for life to a "low" person was extremely painful. Now he could not hide from himself that he, Theodore, had done none of these things. He had kept the law from his youth up. He was fitter for a pure and noble girl than Percival, taken *per se* and in the abstract. Latterly, too, he had heard still further

reports of that young person. It was really very shocking when a young man of large property and position in the county—a man of family, too—disgraced himself. Well, no—he had better not use that word; but identified himself with the frivolous existence of a certain circle. It was a sad thing; morally much to be deplored.

This last account was certainly decisive; no girl like Nora could possibly accept a man who preferred the society of women like Pauline Vietri. The thing was certain; it was out of the question altogether. Theodore had not yet learnt that a woman is nearly sure to waste her heart on the most unlikely man.

Armed with all these reasons, Theodore was brighter; he sketched better than ever. He felt more at ease in Nora's company; his conscience was at rest. He gave himself up to admire. He even went so far as to draw up the rough draft of the settlements he proposed to make. This was politician-like; everything must be mixed up with pens and paper. It was a pity for his peace of mind that he was so strictly logical. It was

a canon with him to examine into a thing from every possible point of view.

There was one point of view which he had hitherto persistently ignored; but the fonder he grew of Nora, the more it would force itself upon him. While he sat by her side on the beach, with the thunder of the surf almost at their very feet, almost worshipping her queenly beauty, the thought would arise in his mind—Had she ever really cared for Percival? If she had, was there any lingering of that feeling now? If so, his hopes were doomed; if he saw the slightest indication of that, he must leave her. He could not marry her; it would be lifelong misery and torture for them both.

Then as there was nothing so much he dreaded in the whole world as such a discovery, he set himself to work to discover it if possible. He watched her minutely; he weighed every word. If her eyes grew dreamy, and her gaze was afar off over the sea, he wondered if she was thinking of Percival. If so, what a terrible injustice he was doing that man; he should hate and

despise himself. When her voice once faltered in singing a certain song, he thought he had discovered such a symptom, and turned deadly pale; but the next moment Nora declared that her throat was sore, and, in proof of it, she refused to go out of the house next day. This reassured him; she was incapable of deception—that he felt sure. He would trust her with his life.

Yet, however reassured, he knew that he must ask her that question point-blank some day—Had she ever cared for Percival? Did she care ever so slightly now? He put it off for the present with the excuse, which he was glad to find, that he had as yet no right to ask it. There was no formal engagement. Poor fellow, he might have asked it in perfect safety; Nora would have declared that she never even so much as thought of Percival. And here was he watching her to detect the slightest allusion to him in her voice or manner! Nora would have died rather than let him see that she remembered Percival. That reserve was such an integral part of her nature.

Theodore was thinking, thinking, think-

ing over this perpetual, hated question, getting more and more pensive, when Nora suddenly asked him to sketch "Old Wootton," as she irreverently called him. She and Rachel agreed that Gerard wore a wig. They were certain of it, because his hair was never disarranged; and his teeth were so white that they believed he wore false ones. "Draw him without a wig, and without his teeth," they cried; and pressed the caricaturist until he did. There was Wootton, with a bald pate, and nose and chin almost touching, so unlike, and yet so irresistibly like the original as visible to the eye, that they laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks.

Ah, Percival, there is nothing like a good hearty laugh for breaking down reserve, and making the whole world kin. That laugh decided Theodore; it warmed his heart, and emboldened him. He would do it.

That sketch of his, by-the-bye, was the most ungenerous thing he ever did in his life. But then the man was deeply in love; he felt that he was gaining a little; and he

had a very strong suspicion that Gerard had inclinations himself towards Nora; how could he help it? The temptation was too strong.





CHAPTER X.

T might have been between two and three in the early morning, or it might have been between three and four. It was of no use looking at his watch, for that was stopped; in fact he rarely remembered to draw it up now. All his old habits were upset, and he had not yet settled down into new ones. Nor did it seem probable that he would settle down either just yet. It was an existence of feverish eagerness, like that of an overtired gambler, whose hollow eyes are still lit up with the glow of expectation as the cards are turned over, forgetful of food, of sleep, of the necessary work of life.

Hamilton pressed him to drink—that would keep him straight. Percival would not. The result was that, after leaving

Pauline, he was wandering purposeless through the deserted streets of London. The nights, especially towards morning, were getting cold and chilly now, but he did not feel it. There was a heat in his veins which made the blood seethe, and he could have torn his shirt-front open to the air if he had only had sufficient self-consciousness to do it.

That was the witchery of Pauline. She took one's consciousness of self entirely away. The thought of hunger or thirst, of weariness, of heat or cold, never occurred to those whom she favoured. The flattery of a handsome woman is never so dangerous as when she is older than the man. Handsome forty will turn the head of raw twenty quicker than the loveliest seventeen. Not that it is safe to intimate anything about Pauline's age—women such as she have no age; their evening sun is bright and warm as the noonday, and there is more colour in the sky. But Percival felt that she was superior to him in a mysterious something; that it was an honour to him to be selected by her, a tribute to his worth; he knew

that she must be older than him, and he felt that he must be very attractive to have, almost at first sight, the attentions of a creature so skilled in the world's ways, so experienced, so handsome, and so much admired. He even went to the length of criticising himself in the glass. His figure certainly was tall and manly, massive about the shoulders. Something in him revolted against saying anything about his face; that was girlish to think so much of the face. The last spark of manhood in him spared him the self-humiliation of admiring his own countenance. His hands were brown from exposure and exercise. He would wear kid always. His clothes were plain, ridiculously plain, for a man of his position. That was soon altered. The fashionable tailor Hamilton recommended altered them according to his light. He did not wholly relish the operation. He felt like the canvas on which the artist showed his skill, and somehow the canvas never would stretch tight enough, he never could feel quite at ease.

Pauline said he at last was doing justice to himself. He revolved that sentence in

many ways. It was clear that he had not hitherto done justice to himself. To bury himself as he had done the last two years at that dull hole in the country, dancing attendance on a "raw" country girl (he was so old and experienced you see); was equivalent to suicide. And then only to think of his moral condition! His feeble mind rejoicing when that girl was kind and pleased; his still feebler soul unhappy if she did not shine on him as usual. An existence depending entirely on a *girl's* caprices; it was childish. More than that, it was wrong. He was not doing himself justice there. At this period of his progress it must not be supposed that Percival had entirely given up Nora. Oh dear no! There was a dim idea in his mind that he *might* perhaps some day, in a distant time, extend her his protection, but it must be under the distinct understanding that he should be free to form what other connexions he chose. Those childish prejudices in which her mind had been educated, according to the custom of the age, could not possibly have any weight with him. But that was

at the greatest distance—in the dim vista of the future—there was no need to think of that yet. She could well afford to wait for *him*. She had kept him at her heels long enough, now it was his turn. He was not quite sure either that marriage was fit for a rational being.

There was a revolting narrowness about it; it was circumscribing the faculties—preventing them from expanding. It was difficult to put it in words, but there was something about marriage which destroyed a man's identity. It brought him down to the earth; there was no soul about it. How far superior such a creature as Pauline was now to marriage! He had a faint, half-defined idea that the true sphere of a Man (such as himself), of a rational human creature, endowed with faculties only a little lower than the angels, was to sit on divans, clothed in purple and fine linen, admired, worshipped, watched among women, as Pauline was among men. The ambition of those millions of beings who composed London was ridiculous—just to become possessed of a few pieces of stamped trash,

or to outshine another in some still more trashy rubbish. How feeble too the minds of Cæsar and Napoleon! What a coarse smell of blood and the shambles there was about such men! The true ambition, the natural one, the one which alone filled in full the design of the Creation, was to shine as Pauline, the loved, the adored, the centre of a circle of lower beings.

Percival felt that he had certain gifts which fitted him for such a position. Had not Pauline singled him out? Was not the distinguished attention he obtained from her a sure sign that he was not as other men—that there was something in him—a peculiarity not exactly definable—which gave him a natural right to receive the homage of the other sex? There was an indistinct vision of an ante-chamber filled with beauty of various styles and of various climes, waiting for admission to him, Percival. How benevolent he would be when he occupied that position! How little selfish or jealous! How he would forward all their private loves, and arrange everything happily for everybody! No one should

depart without a smile on their faces and joy in their hearts. What an immense amount of good he would do! With all his knowledge of the human heart, its intricacies and complications, its subtle distinctions, how he would unravel the tangled threads of attachment, and bring all to peace!

He never had any patience, when he was reading a novel, with the absurd difficulties that the heroine was in. Had he, Percival, been her lover, it would have been different. He would have upset the whole thing in a moment, and put all right. He had no patience with such a lack of common sense. But then people were so ignorant, so feeble-minded; they let others lead them astray so easily, and never had a will of their own. A good deal was owing to want of experience. It was astonishing how much he could see through now his eyes were opened. He could not be blinded again as Nora had blinded him. If ever he fell in love again, he would never do as he had done towards her. He would never give up his own ideas, his own feelings, his own judgment

and pleasures, for the sake of the feebler judgment, the weaker ideas of a girl. He would just say marry me, and have it done at once. If she did not choose to do so, never mind, it did not matter. *He* need not trouble himself; that was her look out.

How fearfully in the days gone by he had laboured at deteriorating his own value! He had done everything he possibly could to depreciate himself. He saw it clearly now. All this attempt to please, this yielding up of his own views to Nora (witness the graceful kindness with which he permitted her to go to St. Leonards), simply tended to make her think that he was nobody, that she could do anything with him. How thankful he was that he had come to London; how providential it was that he had met Pauline!

Ah, Pauline! There was no feebleness about her; all was nature in its grandest development. The rich ripeness of her figure was only equalled by the ripeness of her mind. How childish the girls of the period appeared compared with her! They might well be jealous.

His face flushed a little as he remembered some remark of hers which seemed to indicate that she was aware of his engagement with Nora. He believed Hamilton had betrayed that. He blushed for shame of such a weakness. If Nora could have seen him blushing for shame of having loved her! How like a baby he must appear in Pauline's sight, to even contemplate the idea of binding himself down before he was three-and-twenty to serve all his life in the capacity of a husband, like a boy bound apprentice. Before he had seen the world too! It was very indelicate of Nora to put him, to seduce him into, such a ridiculous position. It was very hard for this man of the world to appear to have had a little feeling in his earlier days. He really must turn his back on all that nonsense. It was time he was a man.

These girls, too, never knew how to dress. Now look at Nora; she attired herself like a milkmaid compared with Pauline. His taste could not stand it. There was no sympathy with the intricate subtleties of colour and the mysterious harmony of tints.

A broad glaring patch of some gorgeous hue, varied with a stripe of grey, like a vulgar parrot, was all her idea of dress. But then, poor girl, that was not entirely her fault; they were all alike, these young things. They had no taste, no judgment. Dress should harmonize with the figure, with the complexion, with the surrounding accessories, even with the furniture of the room, and with itself. There was as much true art in a woman's dress as in any painter's canvas.

Girls were so conventional. They copied each other. Look at their hair. Every one of them did it just alike; one was afraid of being thought behind the other in the race of fashion. Whether they had long heads or short heads, or round heads or square heads, they all did their hair in exactly the same style. But a woman like Pauline now, who really had an artistic, almost a sculptor's eye, dressed in accordance with her own particular requirements. She did not slavishly follow the fashion. Her hair was so placed as to add to the poise of her already exquisitely balanced head. Her dress

seemed a part of herself rather than any mere outside trapping put on for convenience or show.

There was a delicate appreciation of effect in the tints which no painter in his judgment could hope to surpass. His heart began to swell with the idea that it was his mission to do something great and grand, something to make him a hero in her eyes. It was a noble ambition. Only it was so confoundedly hot. The streets were so close; they oppressed him. He wanted fresh air. He would go out into the country. The first policeman told him that it was useless to go to the railway stations yet—there were no trains out. Well, he would walk up and down on London Bridge till sunrise. That could not be long. The sky overhead was of a rich azure colour, faintly tinged with purple—the hue that is only seen a short space before the sun appears. Down the old river seawards there was a flush, and the turrets of the Tower had a glow upon them, though the great ball of light was not yet visible to him. A cock crew somewhere—probably in

some back court. Instinctively Percival paused and gazed over the parapet. He forgot himself for a moment. The grandeur of the mighty city, silent, and yet awaking round him—the very sternness and practical look of the buildings, impressing the mind with a sense of subdued power—drew back the littleness of his soul out of sight for an instant or two.

His eyes fastened on the horizon drank in the glorious dawn of the light, as the glowing sun revealed itself—a visible archangel. The azure sky, the roseate clouds, the glittering water, filled him with a sense of a higher life. If he could only drink in this beauty always he should be immortal. Alas! it was only for a moment. There was the shriek of an engine and the tramp of a policeman. Percival returned to himself, and turned to go, shrugging his shoulders instinctively.

In one of the recesses of the parapet close to him, reclined on the stone bench and fast asleep, was a vagrant—a strong, brawny man, barely decently clad in the filthiest rags. His vast jaw had dropped, and his

wolfish mouth was open with an expression unutterably disgusting. On his breast a woman, still more rudely dressed—her naked shoulders and arms alike withered—was slumbering painfully, and moaning as she drew her breath. Whether it was the step of the policeman or the shriek of the engine, but the man awoke, and yawned as Percival passed. He grinned as he looked down on the unfortunate creature whose head was pillowed upon him, and doubling up his fist he struck her in the mouth. She sprang up with a groan, and blood spurted from her lips. The fellow gave a loud guffaw. Percival felt his blood boil for a second; but he remembered that he was a man of the world now, so he walked on. In Nora's reign that brute would have caught it soundly. But it was low to brawl in the streets; and then, no doubt the woman was a bad character, and really you know, &c.

Percival had pretty nearly arrived at the apotheosis of puppyism. He had another chance of improving himself when he got down to Croydon.

Calling for breakfast at a friend's there, the post brought in Nora's second letter, forwarded at a venture by the butler. Ah! ah! she had come to her senses at last. She began to perceive his value.

He felt that he really had been very shamefully treated by her, now that she freely acknowledged it herself. She had been perverse—capricious to the last degree. However, she now saw her mistake. She was lonely and miserable—was she? Well, she deserved it.

Percival's crest rose rapidly. Here were two women—Pauline on the one hand and Nora on the other—contending for his favour. There was something about Nora very good, notwithstanding her bad taste in dress, &c. Not that she was to be compared to Pauline of course. As to her coming back at once, that was out of the question.

He would keep her at a distance, and make her feel his worth. A thing was valued according to its rarity. He had made himself so common that she thought

nothing of him. Now, he would make himself scarce, and she would come to her senses.

What a fool he was to have felt jealous of other fellows—as if there was the remotest chance of her leaving *him* for any one else even for a moment. She might even then be shedding tears, miserable at his prolonged absence.

It was good for her. He should not write—let her wait. He glanced up at the mirror over the mantelpiece. He was not so very bad-looking. Nora said he was handsome. Pauline said he had not done justice to himself.

They were different types, but they were both very good in their way. As he said before, there was a something about him which well qualified him for the position he held. He would be kind to them both. He might punish Nora for the time, but in the end of course he would behave benevolently towards her. He would be generous. Still, she must wait—a little chastisement would improve her.

Lounging on a couch near the fire, and

sipping his coffee, Percival felt that his mere existence was a boon to more than one. It made him feel grand. Life was quite tolerable.





CHAPTER XI.

THERE is something mysterious about scarlet ; something peculiar, which sets it apart from any other colour. To some eyes green is the favourite hue ; to others blue, or yellow, or brown. There are innumerable shades which please for the moment, and are worn for the hour, but they have no abiding place. They are not universal, and are as short-lived as the rainbow.

Tyre and Zidon, they tell us, were founded a thousand years before our era commenced. Their merchants went down to the sea in ships, and saw the wonders of the deep thirty hundred years—a thousand generations ago. On the edge of the Holy Land they built their havens, their temples, and their houses ; on the very borders of the chosen country on the one hand, and jutting out into the

great common road of waters on the other. While Jehovah, the God only seen by the mind, invisible, unrepresented, acknowledged by the soul, not by the eye, was worshipped within hail almost of their city walls, within they sounded the horn, clashed the silver cymbals, and shouted to Baal and Astarte: Baal, the god of fire, the incarnate sun, clothed in a robe of purple, his sceptre in his hand; and Astarte, queen of the soft evening-tide, under whose natural emblem, the crescent moon, her rites of love and wildest sensuality were celebrated.

They were honest at least in those days. They did not hide their lusts, and hates, and passions under a spurious guise of cant, but openly professed them, deified them, worshipped them, and carried their images in procession. And their greatest trade was purple, Tyrian purple, famous over the earth. Its exact colour has been searched for in vain; learned men have written treatises on it, and hunted over ancient authorities without final success. It still remains an open point, still disputed; but only by the *savants*, the wise men who set their intellect

and their reason above those subtle inner chords, those instincts of human nature to which all learning and all logic is but as a cobweb before the wind.

The world knows very well what was the colour of Tyrian purple, let the wise men say what they may. Primarily it was red, the colour of fire, fire which was the garb of Baal. Red, the colour of life, the hue of the delicate cheek, the tints of the maiden's blush, the colour of the blood in the veins, and the "blood is the life."

The old mystics pleased themselves with finding a sympathy in all things; here they would say that man's greatest gift was life—all his striving and his hopes depended on that. What more natural than that the fluid which flowed in his body, and upon which his life depended, should furnish him with the most cherished colour for clothing his outward being. But let that be as it may, the kings of the earth sought after Tyrian purple, and robed themselves with it on their thrones. It was the sign of power, the mark that they were not as other men—a flag for the honour, and the worth,

and the talent of the world to gather round, and do homage to. It was not to be worn by the common herd, but by the princes only, and by the priests of Baal. Excepting only the women who dedicated themselves to the service of Astarte or Venus, the goddess of the evening; these wore purple and scarlet, for they were princesses of men; and as many men who yielded to their fascinations were worshippers of the Great Queen, their mistress, they were not as common women, they were in the service of Heaven.

Such, too, was another Woman, whose fame has reached over the whole earth; and this was how she was attired—"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colours, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls." Mighty was her power, and great her triumph; great even in her fall. The kings of the earth stood afar off, and lamented her, and the merchants of the earth wept and mourned over her, and "the merchandize of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet."

Cities fell, and nations disappeared, but still the imperial colour lived and flourished; and was the hue of the State robes of the Cæsars in their marble palaces by yellow Tiber's shores. Julius and Augustus, Nero and Caligula, and the rest of that roll of masters of men's fates, and human gods, threw the purple over their shoulders in proud conceit of their own power. And side by side with them there still stalked the figures of women clad in scarlet, parading their shame to all, vain of their infamy, triumphing in disgrace. Down to our own times the monarchs of our world distinguish themselves by the royal purple; and still—but no matter.

Tyre and Zidon are no more. The sand fills up their ancient havens; the seaweed gathers where the keels of ships rode at anchor; a few fishermen's huts, perhaps; a dog, a broken pillar, and fishing-nets drying in the sun—these are the remains of Tyre and Zidon—the famous marts of purple, the manufactories of monarchs' garments. The desolation of the desert is behind them, and the desolation of the barren sea is in front

of them. Power has departed. The ships are rotten; the oars broken; the sails torn; the anchors lost in the abyss. Busy commerce haunts these spots no more.

But thousands of miles away, in the most unromantic country under the sun save one (America), on the shores of a muddy river, a mere streamlet compared with the mighty waters famous in the old world, here has arisen a City of Clay, built of bricks, as Babylon was. And here sits a Queen, at stated intervals, clothed in the hues of Tyre and Zidon, robed in purple. And here at any time of the night, but chiefly when the evening falls, and the roseate hues of sunset are still lingering in the sky, while the crescent moon rises and mingles her pale light with the last rays of the sun—here stalk abroad figures of women clad in scarlet, in purple, in silk and scarlet, dedicated to the service of Baal and Astarte. Scarlet—mysterious, magical colour—clings to them still!

There is something about it inexplicably peculiar—this fatal colour. If a lady is handsome, there is nothing brings out her

beauty into such strong relief. It heightens the glow upon the brunette's cheek, and adds depth to the softness of her glittering eye. It affords a brilliant contrast with the golden hair and the pale complexion of the blonde. Even a plain girl may be made to look spicy with a few jaunty touches laid on by an artist's hand and a scarlet shawl. Like charity it covers a multitude of sins against good taste in the wearer. If there is a flirt, trust her to wear scarlet whenever she can. There is something about it irresistibly attractive to the men.

Take a frosty day, and a crowd of ladies and gentlemen skating; it is certain that the largest number of eyes will follow the graceful evolutions of the scarlet shawl. Let forty carriages go by, and you may bet what you like that the lady in scarlet shall be gazed at ten times more than those in blue, in green, in brown.

The men feel instinctively that there is a spice of wickedness, just a tiny streak of mischief, in the composition of a girl who ventures abroad in a scarlet shawl. She may be absolutely above reproach, so pure

and perfect that even the old maids can see no evil; but still that shawl strikes some chord of electric sympathy. The men would rush to save her from annoyance, to render assistance, to carry a parcel, to rebuke a porter, to fee a guard, after that colour, when a duller shade would not draw them from their stiff indifference. If a lady wants attention when she travels, let her wrap her shoulders in the modern representative of Tyrian purple.

But it is so common! Scarlet is worn by everybody! Every servant girl who can scrape twenty shillings together wears it! Exactly so. Granted that it is common; that proves the point; else why should there always be such a rush for it? But there is scarlet and scarlet. There is the servant-girl scarlet, and there is the opera-cloak scarlet. There are shades of colour, almost beyond price, carefully preserved from sun and light in Regent Street. These are for the princesses—here is Tyre and Zidon—choose your purple, your silk and scarlet here.

A man feels on his mettle directly he

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sees a scarlet shawl; it is like the scarlet flag flaunted before the bulls in the Spanish amphitheatres. He feels bound to show all his gallantry before the fair wearer. His head goes up; he walks more erect; talks louder; throws his glances boldly about. He forgets bills, and stamps, and cash, and post; he casts these paltry, artificial cares aside, and becomes for the moment a man. The oldest, driest, withered-up old cynic feels a feeble bound of the heart, and makes a puny effort to appear at his best when the scarlet shawl comes in sight. Everybody looks back after they have passed the scarlet shawl. It is a weakness of human nature. The eyes will glance at it; it is irresistible.

But there is a subtler form the same influence takes. It is very slight; only half recognised; never, perhaps, just at the moment; but the style and colour, nevertheless, however unconsciously, thrill an answering note of inborn wickedness in the heart. Not wickedness in the orthodox sense of crime and coarseness; but the more delicate, refined instinct of liberty and pleasure—the

unconventional, in fact. There are those who know how to wear an invisible scarlet shawl, ten times more potent than the material robe. They are fair creatures these.

Percival never could remember two consecutive sentences that Pauline had spoken, yet he listened with the deepest attention to all she said. There is a way of saying nothing which makes it far more powerful than the strongest sense or the most brilliant wit; but it is impossible to remember it. The effect remains—the wound is there, but not the weapon that inflicted it.

She had a way of making him intent upon her lips, eager to detect a variation in the tone, quick to apply the slightest softening of the voice to himself. There are many languages in the world, but there is none so full of delicate inflections, at once so ambiguous and so precise, as the language of refined coquetry. Not the vulgar, common playing-off of one man against the other—not the usual encouragement one day and discouragement the next—but the art within the art, the exquisite manipula-

tion of a variety of men. She made him think more highly of himself than he had ever ventured to do.

She did it in a hundred ways, all imperceptible. She had the sweetest innocent way of owning her ignorance, and leading him to parade his knowledge, till he believed himself an encyclopædia. She laughed over the foibles of her friends, and pointed out their imperfections, till he thought himself deep in her confidence, and recognised himself as a high professor in the science of cynicism. He felt that he was elevated, refined, altogether raised up in the scale of being from contact with her.

It was purely Platonic all this. He never even kissed her hand—scarcely so much as touched it. She was quite orthodox according to social laws. There was none of the attractions of wickedness about her, that is, not of vulgar evil; but there was a certain ill-defined reputation about her which was irresistible.

It must not be forgotten that Nora, on the other hand, though she cared nothing for him personally, had felt a degree of in-

terest in Herbert Spencer on account of his ill fame. Pauline's reputation was not of that order.

"And the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair," &c. There is nothing recorded to the detriment of these daughters of men—no black mark against them. They were fair, exceedingly fair—so as even to attract the angels. Perhaps that was their only sin. But somehow there is a lingering feeling against them in the minds of the rigidly virtuous. There is a certain romance about them, and romance is not always the correct thing.

Yet she was petted, visited, made much of, beyond all description. Still there was a difference in her in some way. There were a large number of married men among her admirers. *That* never speaks well for any feminine individual. Let an actress be never so good and so pious, there will always be a majority or a minority, anyhow a lot of people, who will end their descriptions of her with the disparaging comment, "But she's an actress."

This was one of her greatest charms. It

was indulging in vice without viciousness. It was drinking intoxicating liquors without getting drunk. It was the invisible scarlet shawl.

Defoe somewhere discusses the question as to which causes most mischief in the world—the devil walking about without his cloven hoof, or the cloven hoof walking about without the devil. It is a ticklish question, on which only great logicians can decide. Ultimately it is proved pretty conclusively that the cloven hoof walking about without the devil does the most.

Now Pauline had never overstepped the strict bounds of morality in her life, and never would; she was scrupulously moral. But that high-heeled tiny boot concealed a very pretty cloven hoof, which was walking about the world without the devil; in fact, on strictly moral principles.

She rather encouraged Percival to talk about social questions, and he came out quite a philosopher. He was much surprised at the strange scarcity of handsome women. Out of a hundred women only two at most were passable. Out of a thousand

made up of these selected ones, only one was a downright beauty. The luck of finding this representative creature only fell to one man in a hundred thousand.

Pauline resented this as a libel on her sex, though Percival put it pretty plain that she was the representative. But she nevertheless made him quite comfortable. It was very rude of him to say such things. But when reproof is accompanied by a gracious smile——

Percival really thought that it was his mission to instruct mankind. All the old books of religion were wearing out; the Vedas, the Koran, &c. &c. were out of date. He began to seriously contemplate writing a modern Koran. In it he was to delineate two characters—a perfect woman and a perfect man—for others to copy. He had only to carry Pauline in his mind to paint the perfect woman, and the man he could evolve out of his own consciousness, *i.e.*, it would be Percival.

He was getting pretty deeply involved in the influence of the scarlet shawl.



CHAPTER XII.

WITH everything made easy, it was rather a slow process still. Sir Theodore had already got the true official mind. There must be order in everything.

The secret of success in debate, in argument, was to, first of all, lay down the main principles—the foundations. These would be recognised by every mind. If they were laid down thoroughly, and listened to carefully, every one must draw the same conclusions. Then it was the office of the debater to assume this as granted, and to carry out the result to its logical consequences. This was how Sir Theodore prepared his speeches for Parliament and for borough meetings.

Being a young man, he did everything on

abstract principles. There was only a difference in degree between persuading a committee to follow your views and persuading a young lady. In the abstract the theory was the same. Clearly the first thing to do was to make yourself an object of admiration. There were various descriptions of these objects. A man might be an object of admiration for his physical perfection, his strength, his beauty; or for his mental superiority; or for the depth of his soul, or the brilliance of his wit. Finally, without attaining an eminence in either of these specialities, he might be, generally, a proficient in all of them. Sir Theodore was a great student of the exact sciences. He believed that science could accomplish anything. He now brought science to bear on a girl's heart.

Physically he was not strong; but his glass told him he was graceful, as far as the male human being can be in trousers and vest.

It is a question whether the conformation which accompanies strength is not rather ugly than otherwise in modern costume. You get the size, and therefore the vul-

garity, without the delicate outlines of the muscular development. The coat sleeve, for instance, reveals none of the massive beauty of strength; the arm is about the same size all the way down. But a slight figure is *spirituelle*. It leaves more room for the brain. Mentally he had read a good deal. He was clever, at least he had been told so. He could write verses. Perhaps after all, however, the thing that took most was wit. This student of society on mathematical principles, resolved in future to jot down in his pocket-book every humorous idea that occurred to him, for use in the evening with Nora. He really worked hard at it. He had read somewhere that genius was a power of taking a transcendent amount of trouble. This labour quite consoled him. He felt that it would be paid for. On the principles of political economy, Nora must reward him for all this outlay.

Everything was very finished about Sir Theodore; he was fitted up in the highest style of decorative art, as the upholsterers say. A very estimable young man in every respect; an honour to his country. This

was how it was that time went on without any palpable change in the relations between him and Nora. There was not the slightest additional flavour of affection about their intercourse. They never called each other dear or darling; there was no surreptitious meeting of hands, no silent expressive pressure. His visits were not unlike a tutor's, who felt that he had a great and responsible task before him. There never was a man so thoroughly undemonstrative.

Now, Nora had always declared that she liked demonstration above all things; but she was always declaring one thing and doing the other.

Sir Theodore felt that he was great in science; now, if he could get her to take an interest in it, and reveal to her the vastness of nature, *i.e.*, of his own mind?

Nora listened with her eyelids drooping in that peculiar way of hers. She was very cautious what she said, being, as she knew, lamentably ignorant. But she was not to be done like that. After he had spent an evening in explaining some branch of modern research to her, she would go into

the library, fetch down a book upon the subject, and presently discover some fact long ago buried in oblivion. Then she posed him with it. This delighted the tutor; he thought her the cleverest girl in the world, she knew something that he did not. Of course that something was not of the slightest importance—a mere exploded theory; but it showed her powers of observation. She only required cultivating; she had a most original mind; he felt that he was doing his duty in educating her. But they had one topic upon which they really did approach to something like sympathy. It was the church in general; and in particular the church at Stanley. He had an advantage over Percival here. He really was interested in the subject. He had studied it deeply, and was prepared to legislate upon it. She felt that he was at home in it, and that he listened to her intently. Now Percival always got impatient, and hated the very name of the place.

It is very peculiar how these ladies, let them be never so mischievous and never so wild, always have a reverence for the church.

Nothing offends them so much as any sarcasm on this one cherished institution. Percival was bitter upon it. Not that he really cared, or in fact ever thought much about it; but he was jealous of the sentiment Nora wasted upon it. Sir Theodore, on the contrary, listened to her as long as she liked to talk; and Nora was rather fond of talking. After these religious discussions, Sir Theodore's reflections were of the most gratifying nature. He had indeed found a treasure—a truly pious girl, whose mind soaring above bonnets and the weaknesses of the sex, dwelt on things eternal. He felt that he had a great duty to perform—to lead this soul to its final resting-place. In some measure it was placed in his humble hands as the instrument. He must purify himself for the task with prayer. If he had ever been conscientious, it was now for him to redouble his watch over himself, lest his work be soiled by a selfish or vain motive. It was not necessary for him to deny himself any rational pleasure—that was the mistake of the ascetics of the mediæval times—but it was necessary for him to examine every

thought and every wish; to think before saying or doing, in order that he might preserve that high ideal which alone was worthy to be placed before her. The husband, it must never be forgotten, was the copy for the wife to follow, the superior creature—and so on. He was afraid that the great majority of married men did not recognise this responsibility.

Herbert Spencer, when he came back from his yacht, and found how things stood, declared that Sir Theodore was the d—dest conceited hypocritical humbug that ever he had met. He ought to be kicked about in the fore-castle of a collier for six months; that would take some of the Day and Martin polish off his scented skin.

Herbert had seen fellows who dressed up to the nines, you know; and fellows who made a swell with their money, and thought themselves somebody, you know; but Sir Theodore made him mad.

He alternated between a state of despair and concentrated rage. On the whole, he rather felt like a dog that has had his day and begins to recognise that it is over.

Nora would not readmit him to the slightest approach to a renewal of their former intimacy. She morally kicked him every time he came near her, and he slunk off with his tail between his legs.

Sir Theodore could not sufficiently approve of her high-principled conduct in keeping that low, vulgar fellow at a distance.

Herbert, in lack of somebody to sympathize with him, made great friends with Master George, who ran down every now and then to see Nora from Tunbridge Wells, ostensibly for a look at the sea.

He was just as much aggrieved as Herbert. She did not absolutely cut him, but she made him keep his distance; there was none of the old hand-in-hand familiarity, no playing with his hair in the passage. Nora was above him now.

In consequence he hated Sir Theodore. He, with his boyish hatred of show, saw that she was on her good behaviour because of him. Instead of turning against her, he turned against Stanley. Outwardly he was polite, and even reverential; but when he

got alone with Herbert—Herbert's yacht was a great source of sympathy between them.

Master George was sailing mad, and it is not every boy of sixteen who can have a fine cutter of five-and-thirty tons at his command. There was a firm bond of union between these two. Only let there be an opening, and they would put their feet down pretty heavy.

Spencer was for thrashing Sir Theodore; caning him outright on the Parade, right in front of all the world; but the boy dissuaded him. He was sharp enough to see that that would be the very worst thing for their cause. It would make Stanley the injured party, and Nora would resent the consequent publicity. Wait.

Herbert, who was only a great boy, was never tired of pointing out the extreme conceit of Sir Theodore. He once knew a fellow who was "uppish," because he believed two girls were in love with him at the same time; but that was nothing to this sickening Stanley.

Somehow, however, they both hid in

their secret hearts a grov
that Sir Theodore would w
something so confoundedly s
the fellow everywhere. He
figure; he had the gift of
was so finished, so refined,
was impossible but that
home.

The only hope was in
ableness and fits of temper.
luck, seemed to have disapp
quiet as a lamb now—u
smooth and calm.

Herbert did not like t
looked like having made up
She never overstepped the
strictest propriety now.

Herbert sighed, as he
days when she asked him t
a flat race. Might he be l
not sorry now that he ref
it was the ostensible origi
between them, but becaus
effectually spoilt Sir The
ment.

Sir Theodore was never

his life. He was progressing he felt, and as rapidly as was safe. The time was approaching when he might formally ask for her hand, but he had not yet put the question—Did she ever care for Percival?

The more he succeeded, the closer and the firmer grew the relations between them, the more difficult it became to ask her that. For one thing—he was afraid to. She might take it as the greatest insult he could offer her. It was not unlikely that she would do so.

But all his labours, his self-denial, his long, long hours of vigil and study and preparation, were as nothing, if there still remained a single memory of Percival in her mind.

The more he cultivated his natural inclination to supererogatory conscientiousness the stronger this conviction became.

His life was thrown away, lost, if the minutest recollection of Percival was dormant in her heart. His very courtship was a species of adultery. If those two, Percival and Nora, were united in heart; before heaven they were married, and he was a

guilty man in endeavouring to win her affections. Time, and the absence of all the decided symptoms from Nora's conduct, while it reassured him, yet strengthened his feelings in this respect. The connexion between him and Nora must be utterly without flaw.

He recognised the change in Nora with heartfelt gratification. She was so much more gentle, so thoroughly lady-like. The abruptness of her manner had disappeared, and she was polished in her address.

It was really very gratifying, for he could not but put part of it at least down to his influence. There was a certain degree of natural pride in taming this glorious creature. He immediately stifled that feeling—it was profane. It was not his doing, he was merely an instrument, barely capable of freewill.

He and Gerard Wootton were on the best of terms. They were both so refined, there was a natural sympathy between them. At least so Stanley would have said. Wootton detested him; but he was always most polite to those he most disliked, always

excepting boys. He cordially hated children of all ages, and did not care to conceal it. Unlike old age in general, he did not see the pleasure of watching the fresh feelings of youth, much as we watch the sunshine on the distant landscape long after its beams have left us in shadow. But then he was only forty, and so youthful in appearance. Sir Theodore contemplated asking him to be his best man; it was a compliment only due to him.

Sir Theodore did not disguise now that he felt certain of success. It was very slight, barely perceptible, but there was a distinct assumption of a right to take an interest in her now. This drove Herbert Spencer nearly frantic. He would have willingly given her away himself to anybody in the world just to disappoint that "awful puppy."





CHAPTER XIII.

NORA was rather sad on Christmas day. She said that this Christmas was not half so merry as the last. When pressed for a reason she did not exactly know, but still there was something wanting. Was there ever any one over twenty who did not occasionally, at least that night, sigh with a sense of disappointment? They might have been laughing, singing, dancing, merry as possible a moment before; they may be the reverse of pensive, or even reflective, at ordinary times; but surely enough before the clock strikes midnight, the heart will remember itself once, and find a something lacking. This Christmas is not so happy as those we have passed before. The roast beef, the plum-pudding, the wine, the desert—the traditionary good

cheer—is there still. There are laughing faces, merry voices, the hum of conversation, and the glow of the great yule log. It is all as usual, but you are not the same. It may be that that is the cause. Regular as the clockwork, always the same—unchanged—that day of days comes round. But silent, and unperceived in the steady flow of unnoticed time, a change has been going on in you. And now at the moment when the gaily-decorated tree recalls that vanished scene as it showed twelvemonths before, you feel that you are not the same. Or it may be that some one has gone from the midst of us. We do not listen to-night, as we listened that last Christmas eve, for the sound of the wheels over the frozen snow, that shall bring us the well-remembered form and the warm clasp of the hand. All is silent without; the snow is unmarked by horse's hoofs; the clear air does not echo the crack of the whip; it is still, silent. They come not, and we know that they cannot come. The real ghosts are those empty spaces where the dead, or the absent, once sat. Their icy touch withers up the

mirth, and checks the lip even as it utters a jest. What would they have said—what smart repartee—what answering wit would have flashed from them? But it is necessary to smile, and to sing, and to play, and to rack the memory for enigmas; and all at once breaks on the mind the horror of pleasure made a toil. What a spectre it is!

So Nora was silent, and sad, and very gentle in her ways. Sir Theodore was not there that evening, and heartily glad was she of that. They were a quiet party. She could sit by the fire, and gaze into it till her eyes ached, and think, as she called it. Her thought was simply a sensation of a faint, dull pain. She did not attempt to throw it off; she cherished it. It did not grow stronger nor fade away. It was like the hollow sound of the sighing wind round the house. Laugh and be as noisy as they might, that low, mournful undertone was there, and at the pauses came in with its strange, weird note.

There was a fascination in this unknown, unnamed sorrow. It was another way of eating the lotos. It was something which

no one else knew anything of, or could share in if they did. It was a secret whose meaning was not in all things clear even to herself.

She did not connect it with Percival ; at least she did not recognise that it had anything to do with him. Yet somehow the old, old love came welling up in her heart, till a great tear gathered unheeded in her eye and rolled slowly down her cheek.

It was a crude, but faithfully true remark of the ancient poet's, that the cask early impregnated with the flavour of the good wine retains it for years afterwards, no matter what liquor replaces the exhausted juice of the grape. He had filled her young, fresh heart with the strong wine of his passion, deeply imbuing every atom of her being with the rich colour of his love ; and although the flow of that glowing stream was stayed, yet the water others poured forth in its place failed to satisfy her thirst. The lees of her love for Percival tinged and stained all the emotions that the rest excited.

Nora's nature was exceedingly strong and

deep. She was impulsive to a fault upon the surface, but there was an unsuspected warmth of abiding affection and firmness beneath. What a fallacy it is that still waters run deep! There are doubtless many brawling streams barely covering the ankle of those who ford them, and whose chattering murmur rises up from afar in the still summer evening air. But are there not silent ponds, clothed with duckweed and floored with rankest mud, shallow so that the moorhen can hardly dive out of sight, and yet still, stagnant, noisome? Are there not canals, clogged with weeds and rushes, still enough and silent, yet shallow and utterly unattractive? And the deepest of them all, old Ocean—unfathomable, unexplored—is it not ever tumultuous and noisy on the surface and at the edge? How often does the merry laugh, and the nimble foot, and the rapid flow of talk simply serve to conceal the depth below? If it were possible for man to look down from the side of his ship into those vast ocean chasms, and to see their depth made visible, what human being could bring him-

self to trust to the narrow plank between him and that eternity of beneath? But the restless waves and rolling billows, the foam and spray, hide the lurking unknown, and distract his mind.

How could we venture to trust ourselves in the company of others, if we could always see the raging hell of murderous passion, the firm, unyielding hate, the imperishable purpose, glossed over and hidden by those smiling lips and glowing eyes? Trust it not; it is not always the still waters that run the deepest.

Yet they thought her so much improved. You see the foam, and bubble, and spray—the dancing wavelets reflecting the brilliant sunlight too dazzlingly for the eye—were gone. She was so gentle, so ladylike, so unselfish. She did not, as of old, demand boisterously to have her own way; she did not insist upon leading that the rest might follow her.

They thought her so much improved. Sir Theodore felt that she had resigned herself to that refined cultus which he practised. He had had certain misgivings at first,

which even his love could not entirely cover over, that Lady Stanley could be at times rather trying.

She was too natural—too wild and free altogether. He trusted that the quiet atmosphere of his home, and the rational degree of restraint imposed by marriage, might prove effectual to tone her down. Still it was an experiment; and if it did not succeed?

Love her as he might, he could not settle down comfortably to such a prospect. It threatened such an upheaval of all his cherished ways and ideas. It was like turning a splendid panther loose in a conservatory of gorgeous and priceless exotics. Every graceful bound of the creature would be accompanied by a painful destruction of carefully nurtured plants.

The dread of this haunted him at first; but with joy he saw that she was changing. After all it was only the result of the society she had kept. It was not altogether without a pang of jealousy that he recollected that society had principally been Percival's. Still, now that she was among ladies and

gentlemen, her true nature came to the front. Nothing could surpass the quiet ease of her deportment. So thoughtful too, for others.

Sir Theodore was enchanted. The last link in his chain was forged. The faintest wavering of purpose that remained in his mind was removed. He felt that Nora and he were exactly suited for each other. There was a community of taste, of manner, of inclination. It was not only her beauty that had received a tenfold increase since the change in her manner of life. She was peerless. This was because she conformed to his ideal—*he* the sole judge and valuer.

So quiet and gentle, so lady-like and subdued! In good truth, it was sheer apathy. Nora had no life left in her, no animation. Everything was so monotonous. Sir Theodore with his talent, his criticism, his severe eye, his refined ways, and delicate subtle touches, had driven her into a narrow circle. He had circumscribed her—tied her as it were to a stake—and told her to go round and round, and feed on that one ring of grass for ever, never daring even to lift

her glance to the rolling pr
afar off. And she felt no
through. There was the
threads that bound her wo
like cobwebs had there been
part. But there was nor
sitting by a fire continuous
grew drowsy, and the limb
and the breath feeble, and
its action, till all thought
up and rushing out into th
was gone.

Nora shivered as she
mental fire, and drew her
and folded her hands into s
The spur of action wa
Percival who drove her to
Spencer, not Herbert Spe
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He excited her faculties, n
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mad gallop over the down
that his eye was on he
creature curvet and pran :

paces. It was not Herbert Spencer she was sailing with, it was Percival. It was not old Wootton that she was playing on the organ to, it was Percival. While she chattered with the sodden-faced man, her heart was thinking "What will Percival say of me?" There was an incentive to flirt then, it galled Percival. It was just a little tiny morsel wicked. There was the shadow of the red shawl over it.

But now all was dull, tame, monotonous. And Sir Theodore industriously piled up the coals of the fire, and raked out the ashes, and stirred up the embers, keeping the heat up, forcing the growth of this unnatural hot-house flower, and calling it to himself love-in-idleness. He was very happy in these days, was Sir Theodore. He had it all his own way. He felt that he was a person of importance at that great house in the Square at the back of the Parade. His arrival was an event, and his first advent an era. The triumph of his principles had been long in coming, but their truth was now manifest. He had not cultivated himself in vain. He felt that he had not hidden his light under

the traditionary bushel. If he was right in this one matter, the most crucial test of all—if he was irresistible here, it was clear that his views were correct in other quarters. A day would come yet when the name of Theodore Stanley would be high among the leaders of the nation: when his ideas would be put into practical form.

A proud time that for Nora. He knew that she was ambitious—he felt it. That low, broad brow was made for a coronet—narrower heads had worn a diadem. Sir Theodore, like other young men, identified himself with the whole world. Changes in his personal condition and state of mind were synonymous with a similar though future feeling among multitudes. He was strengthened in his own conceit. He was grateful to Nora for strengthening him; he felt able now to grapple with the difficulties of political life. He should write his memoirs yet—memoirs that would be eagerly looked for; and in them he would do full justice to the influence she had exerted upon his career.

There was an exactness in Sir Theodore

before, now there was precision in everything he did. His letters were folded to a hair's-breadth; the stamp upon the envelope was in its proper place, with the head of the Queen upright; the address was clear, minute to a fault. In the very motions of his body there was a precision. The gesture of his hand went thus far, and no farther; his step was measured, his attitudes more decided. Insensibly the increased importance and confidence of the man filtered down into the minutest actions of daily life. Nothing was trivial to him. The old, old haunting fear lest Nora should have ever really cared for Percival—lest she should still have a lingering memory of him, was fast being lulled to sleep. It was an insult to himself even to think of such a thing. It was impossible. There was no comparison between him and that fellow. To hesitate, to falter, and to doubt his own power of attracting Nora's love, was undervaluing his own abilities. Sir Theodore was doing justice to himself, in fact, as we saw Percival do a little while ago.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE course of life is usually little better than a drifting upon the current. Except to those bold navigators who, urged by passion, or by love of gain, stretch out straight into the pathless ocean, and so escape the tides and eddies of the shore, the greater part of the lives of most of us is spent in nothing but drifting this way and that, as the tide changes. It is only now and then that something pricks us to energy and to furious battling with the waves.

Nora was drifting; heedless of whither she was going. What gigantic latent power there is in every human being if they would but use it; but they will not. What is there that a man cannot accomplish if he will but put his whole soul and mind into

it? Yet, let the desire be never so strong, how feeble are the efforts commonly made to attain the object! They work but a few hours, and that in a grudging way; they employ their faculties only in part—only in the conventional manner. The time is mainly spent in sleeping, eating, and drinking—idling in a hundred shapes. But if the hand were used to its full extent, and the mind put on the strain, what could not be done? It is the prejudices, the narrowness of the circle in which we grow up, that blunts the power of most of us. We must not do this, and we ought not to do that; and society would elevate its eyebrows if we did the other; and so on *ad infinitum*. What we do is only done in the conventional manner. Now and then, once in a thousand years, there rises up a man who knows himself, and the enormous power which nature has gifted him with. He understands that mystic sentence which was written on the gate of the Grecian city—"But know thyself to be a man, and be a god."

Only thoroughly appreciate the forces with which nature has endowed you; feel

the muscle and the mind, and the still higher divine instincts of the soul. Only say to yourself, I am a man. I am not bound in a narrow circle like the animals. I have a hand, not a claw, or a hoof; a thing with which I can grasp, and guide, and make; a thing with which I can gesture, and soothe, and communicate my feelings to others; a tool with which I can shape both matter and mind. I have a voice; I have a mind; I can design; I can reason; I can draw conclusions. Only really and thoroughly estimate the abilities and powers of a man, and you find yourself a demi-god. Such men were Cæsar and Napoleon; both of whom broke through the traditions, and the feeble practice of their time, and exhibited themselves as men—not weak creatures whose sphere was circumscribed by absurd prejudices and acquired habits. It is not for every one to be a Cæsar or a Napoleon to the world at large; but it is possible for every rational being to be the Cæsar of his own life and fortune.

How easy would it have been for Nora to have escaped the influences closing in around

her on every side; how simple to have broken through the tangled creepers and twisted tendrils, that were growing up around her from sheer idleness and apathy, before they got too strong! How easy to have returned to her own home! She was of full age; and her father's will, by special instructions, left her entirely unfettered. It was but to say the word; to step forth from the door; for her purse was full. The ingenuity of man had spanned the distance with an iron bridge, over which she would be carried lightly and swiftly as a gossamer blown before the breeze, without an effort of her own; idly sleeping, if she chose, on softest cushions, and wrapped with warmest rugs. It was but to write a few short words upon a slip of paper, and the telegraph would bring her own carriage to meet her, and her dinner, of the choicest viands and wines, would await her at the exact moment she chose.

The whole machine of the world was at her service, and yet she was powerless. Her pride would not let her return. Percival had not replied to her letter; she would

not show him that she wished to see him. Her pride—that feeblest, and weakest, and most childish of the feeble, weak, and childish bonds which prevent us from using the faculties given to us by Heaven. What miserable, reason-denied, low-organized brute, feeding upon the grass of the field, driven along by blows and curses, and slaughtered at last as a tree is hewn down for human fuel—what wretch such as this would refuse itself a pleasure or an advantage for pride's sake? No, you say, because it has no pride—it has no reason. Then Heaven take from us that misled reason which produces pride; and which numbs and deadens the will and the deed, poisoning the freedom of life!

With a word she could have sent Sir Theodore away for ever; but her vanity, and something, too, of the force of inanition, prevented her. Her vanity—Percival was gone; she had driven Spencer from her; she had not the energy now to obtain new ones; there was none but Theodore to feed that never-satisfied, ravenous desire of admiration. It was with a gentle touch, but

still he was endlessly engaged in stroking her down as a man would stroke a cat. It did not make her purr ; but it produced that drowsy, idle feeling. She could not do without it. It was a species of slow mesmerism—a numbing of all the faculties.

It is a question whether this bond was not more despicable than the other. What more depraved and vitiated taste can there be than that which is satisfied alone with the breath of others, their praise, their admiration—their praise, remember, miserable creatures, more childish than yourself—when the whole open expanse of Heaven is free to you to inhale the fresh breezes of the downs, or the salt bracing air of ocean ! What an existence, depending entirely upon the caprices, the narrow-mindedness, of others ! What a forced and hot-house life, which a single frost, a single window left undone, would blast and ruin for ever ! Every moment spent therein more and more contracts the natural strength of the plant, and renders a return to the open air and the real sunshine impossible. It is a weakness of

the feminine mind, but how much more a weakness of the masculine one!

In this age, when every one either writes or speaks, it spreads like a disease this epidemic of conceit, feeding upon the breath of fame. A sorry sight to watch a man of real talent and sterling worth flattering the passions, and pandering to the weak ideas of the multitude, just to gain applause—to be elevated upon their fanatic shoulders, and be borne along aloft; while all the while, did he but for one moment examine into the pretence of the thing, he would despise himself utterly. What do the papers say? Is not this as feeble and as weak as the girl who trembles with eagerness to catch a word or a hint that shall show she is admired?

The man's article, or his speech, is but the equivalent of the girl's new bonnet, or new style of dress. If it was but honest; if it was but spoken or written from the heart, the speech or the article would be as superior as the sun is higher than the earth. But the great majority are written and spoken just to print, and see what the papers will say.

What miserable feebleness is this! Verily there will yet come a time when the man of genius, the man who is true and honest, whose heart, or mind, or soul, is full of something which he believes is for the good of men to know, will shrink from print as from pollution—as a mark which would brand him as a mere seeker of applause.

He will commit his thoughts to paper in his own handwriting only, and restrain by legal process any person from publishing them; allowing his work to be circulated by written copies only, and these made by or for those who wish to read, and not by hired scribes for sale. Then there might be some measure of the worth of a thing, judging from its circulation; now the more utterly weak and false, coined for show, and not for weight, the wider the flow of copies: the louder the trumpets are blown; the larger the acres, and fields of posters, and bills, and advertisements. Then the feeble things would scarcely reach a mile beyond the author's home; but the real, genuine, sterling works would slowly, but none the less surely, spread throughout the globe, and go down

from age to age, as the classics did, simply by its intrinsic worth. Now even printed is immortal.

Nora was far more excusable than the men who rush to the reading-room, or the book-stall eager for the next

She was a woman in the eyes of the world a weaker vessel, as the cant has dubbed her. She did not deserve this admiration—at least not the amount brought to her daily, hour by hour, to month. She only sat under it meekly—yes, meekly. It would have filled her with indignation if it was barely above the common

That was the very reason why it did not shock her into anything startling. It was not put than openly put. It was in its place, and yet so insinuating that she would have resented that more temptuously than Sir Theobald would have true.

His advance was so slow, and so gradual that it did not alarm her

was literally nothing to escape from. Yet somehow, of late Nora had got a faint, dim idea that all the world was gradually arraying itself against her. She felt—she could not express it—but she felt that she was being slowly hemmed in without perceiving the meshes of the net. She had no desire to move, nor any energy to do so; but still her mind was awakening to a perception of her position.

It dawned upon her that Sir Theodore had been her constant visitor and companion for months. She recognised that her daily walks and drives—her very books from the library—all had some invisible connexion with him.

The ideas which floated through her mind, and excited curious speculation in her peculiarly original way, originated from Sir Theodore.

Aunt Milly was constantly talking of him—constantly praising him. At church, if he was not there, he was associated with it all—with the swell of the organ, with the intoning of the choir. His sentiment

upon all things connected
breathed out upon her from
brooded heavily over her in
the lofty aisles. The room
were full of his presence.
impress upon them—his in
the very furniture. At did
what he liked and what he
dilettante style of delicate fe
guided her own choice.

In conversation, whether
politics, or the news of the
what it might, it was still
was all Sir Theodore.

Like the Egyptian hieroglyph
in the scene of her life Sir
out larger, the most gigantic
all, as the king upon the
“chambers of imagery” over
And the world?—society?

Nora had a growing feeling
were arraying themselves
They had sealed her door
Theodore's to them. To
was Sir Theodore's; to all

acquaintances she was his. They left her with him; they moved mysteriously and invisibly away, and left her next him.

By their connivance he was ever at her side. It was like a dream. Faintly she saw that she was drifting, but had no will to turn the sails and put the helm about, and try a new tack.

As if in memory of her former self, now buried and past, she fell back into ways that had long been given up; not in their entirety, but in a languid manner, like one who has been sick, and plays a few bars upon the piano—notes of an old familiar and much loved tune. She did not admit Herbert Spencer to the old place, but she let him talk to her again of his athletics and of his sailings. He was not allowed to use his old slang expressions—he was made to talk as a gentleman—he was made to feel his distance. She walked with him up and down the Parade, in a languid manner listening to him. This was worse than the former treatment to poor Herbert. He felt as if he had been attending upon an invalid—there was no “go” in her now, as he expressed it to

Master George, she had turned "stale"—put him in mind of his sister's ways, who died of consumption. That fellow Sir Theodore was like the dry rot. He should like to tie him to his kedge anchor and drag him westward for an hour or two in ten fathoms.

Nora was mother-like in her ways towards Master George. She did not rattle on with him as of yore; but she treated him as a young matron might her nephew. She petted him, gave him money, promised him a horse all to himself, told him he should come and see her and go out with the game-keeper shooting "when I go home," she said with a sigh.

George was her devoted slave. It made her smile to watch his eagerness to serve her. Gradually he took up her cause as her champion. He was not particularly careful what he said or did. He would very soon have played such practical jokes upon Sir Theodore, whom he detested, as would have driven that very worthy young man past all endurance. But Nora checked him at once in that direction. He might do what he

liked and say what he liked, but he must be perfectly polite to Sir Theodore. This was bitter as wormwood to the boy's impulsive nature ; but he obeyed. He would not have pained her for the world. By slow degrees she got to trust him. He was the only one she could trust—the only one she could open her heart to. She did not make any confession in downright words, but George soon found that she had loved Percival. He more than half suspected that she loved him still. In an instant all his sympathies were with Percival. He was not jealous of him or of Sir Theodore. The boy was rational enough to know that Nora could never be anything more to him than she was now ; that was the very reason why he wished to see her happy. He never would believe that she could be happy with Theodore. It was very, very sweet to be Nora's confidant, to feel that he knew more of her heart than even Rachel, who shared the same bed with her, and ten times more, he was sure, than Sir Theodore. But he did not quite like her motherly way to him. It was as much as to say—You cannot help me ; you would if

you could, but you are only a boy. He was restive under this. He had an idea that he was quite strong enough to help her; he knew he was bold enough, if only he could see the way. But how was he to fight this unseen enemy, this ill-formed cloud, this monster without shape? There was nothing tangible to lay hold of. George brought her the first snowdrop. He gathered it himself. He had watched for it for weeks. All he feared was that Sir Theodore would forestall him. He need not have worried himself, Sir Theodore was incapable of such a childish folly. But Nora was passionately fond of flowers, and George knew it. Sir Theodore knew it too, and he had brought her many magnificent rarities, many strange and exceedingly beautiful orchids. George brought her a simple snowdrop. Her fingers trembled as she took it. There rushed through her mind the memory of the time when Percival used to bring her the first flowers of the spring—the white snowdrop, the yellow crocus, and the delicious violet. The tears forced themselves into her eyes. Inexpressibly pained, George

threw his arms round her (they were alone) and said, he never knew why or how the thought occurred to him, "Do you love him?"

He meant Percival. He was not quite sure that she still loved him; he wanted to be certain before he attempted anything. But she mistook him, and thought that he meant Sir Theodore. It was the first time that the word "love" had been used in connexion with him. He had never used it, not once in their long acquaintance. And now it reached her ears for the first time while she held the snowdrop—Percival's snowdrop—in her hand! Did she love him?—what a mockery the thing seemed. She kissed George on the forehead the first time, and left him.

That one word had touched all the very core of her being, it had touched the quick. It had awakened her. The dream was over—the fireside slumber was gone. Her old energy returned to her, with the addition of a desperate feverishness. Her resolution was taken that night.



CHAPTER XV.

IT was nothing very dreadful, this resolution, after all; but it required a deal of thought to accomplish it without a chorus of surprise after so long a period of inertness. It was only to go to London. But the excuse—the pretext that must be found.

It was getting near the end of January, and was bitterly cold. Nora felt the cold more than she had been accustomed to do; she had taken so little exercise lately. She said she wanted a sealskin jacket. Aunt Milly recommended three very good shops in the town. No, she objected to them. Local shops were always secondhand. Very well; she could write to London, and have a dozen sent down for choice. No, that would not do. They would be

sure to send the unsaleable ones. There was nothing like going oneself.

So Rachel and Nora started for town by a very early train.

She had a hankering desire to see him, and see him she would at any cost. Why not then at once return home? Surely he would come to her. She could not bend her mind to such a confession of weakness as going home would be. She had left in direct opposition to his wishes; to return was to own that she was wrong. Dull and unhappy as she was, she was not yet subdued to that. There was spirit enough in her yet.

She knew how fond he was of London; he was almost sure to go there. He would not stay at home all that time; he had over and over again declared that his dull house was unbearable by himself; he could only put up with it while she was near. She felt sure that he had gone to town, and to town she would go to seek him.

She had no definite programme. She did not even know the address of his club, nor indeed the full title. She had an idea that

it began with the letter "all. But that mattered not the slightest thought there. To go to a club the utmost she was capable of was to walk slowly past the window.

This girl, who at one time had actually seriously quarrelled with her father because he would not let her go to a club, was exposed to the remarks of the most vulgar of the crowd, concerning the idea of calling a gentleman's club, where she had been treated with the utmost delicacy. Oh, but she cared for her own caste. For she cared nothing; their remarks were not to her. But these gentlemen had their own order. It was impossible for anything that might look like a club. She had been so little interested in the matter, she did not know whether it was a club. At any rate she could not do otherwise, so strong was her prejudice. She had heard of Percival, that she had known anything to have known

behind one of those bow-windows. She would have called him to her side, if only to fly in his face and quarrel with him the moment she had seen him.

It was therefore on the wildest speculation that she went to London. She only guessed he was there in the beginning, and the chance of seeing him, of finding that one atom among those myriads, was utterly infinitesimal. She might go a hundred times, and never catch sight of him; she might pass within ten feet of him, and never suspect his presence. Ten times more dense than the densest African jungle is the human labyrinth of London.

She knew all this very well. She quite understood the folly of the hope. Yet she never faltered a moment. She knew she should see him—she felt it by one of those inexplicable instincts to which women are peculiarly susceptible. In her fast days she would have bet any odds on her success.

She was very lively on the journey, much to the delight and astonishment of Rachel. Rachel had grown rather wearied of her quiet, gentle manner; there was no

companionship about it. She wanted some one who would join in her own gaiety, who would jest at everything, and never dwell more than ten minutes on one thought. Nora seemed just in such a mood now. People going to the scaffold have been known to exhibit the same phenomena. She was not going to the scaffold, but she knew very well that her whole future depended upon her interview with Percival. She was to meet him by accident, remember—not to be in search of him. She felt that a crisis in her life had come; the balance was so equal now that a grain of dust would depress it on either side. Weary of the suspense of waiting and watching the quivering scales, she was in search of that grain of dust.

It was high noon before the selection of the jacket had been made. She lingered over it as long as possible. It was her policy to delay, to remain in town till the last minute. She had insisted on driving there from the station in a Hansom. Rachel demurred a little at first, but Nora was in one of her wild moods, and irresistible.

Rachel was not loth either, secretly. You could see about you in every direction; it was great fun.

Nora's eyes were everywhere. They dwelt searching upon the long, long, endless lines of the sombre liveried armies marching along the pavements, each seen but for a moment, and before out of sight succeeded by another. It was impossible for the eye, quick as its perception was, to convey a full impression to the retina before the object on which it rested was gone. Yet she knew that she had not seen him—that he was not among any of these. It was not by the eye only that she should recognise him—not by what the eye was conscious of seeing. There were minute matters—the poise of a head, the sway of the frame, the peculiarity of the walk, and others too ill-defined to describe. These she might not actually see, and yet be conscious of. But they were not there. Still the armies were marching on. What a great battle this must be which required such endless streams of soldiers, what an Armageddon, what a gathering of the

nations to the great battle of life! Her eyes ached watching them—ached with the continued effort to sift the mass.

She had a dim, faint recollection of some old story of a rude, unlettered peasant journeying, and coming to a broad and flowing river. Unable to pass, he sat down in his simplicity to wait till the water had flowed and sunk away. What a watch his would be who sat himself down by this river of life to wait till the waters ebbed! None but the patient stars, the sentinels of eternity, could endure such a waiting.

Was she condemned to wait like that for Percival? Though the way was long and the cab slow from the immense traffic, yet they reached the emporium at last, and still no sign of him. She lingered over the sealskins and the other delicate furs. They were spread before her in rich profusion. They showered the priceless spoils around her feet.

Rachel was against the sealskin. It was so common, so rough and coarse. She advised the more delicate furs, with their exquisite shading. But Nora had a memory

in her heart which no persuasion could banish away. Percival preferred sealskin. Last winter he had endeavoured to persuade her to wear it, and she, out of mere wantonness of gaiety, refused, and made sport of his anxiety to shield her from the cold.

“Sir Theodore does not like seal,” said Rachel at last, shooting her last bolt.

This decided Nora. Whatever her future might be, for that day at least she was Percival's, and she would do as he would have wished. So the sealskin at last was bought and paid for, and they two went forth into the street.

They had no cab this time; they would walk. They went to a high-class establishment and lunched. Rachel was terribly hungry from the cold; Nora ate nothing, but the wine sustained her. She lingered over it, watching every one who entered or who passed, listening to the occasional words that reached them. Still there was no sign of Percival, and the time came when they must go forth.

It required little persuasion to get Rachel to walk up Regent Street. Here I shall

meet him, thought Nora. three-quarters of an hour seen nothing. As a last was going fast, she thought. They called a Hansom, as course. The man smiled well that he could not enter to chariot wheels, but if green enough, he did not why he should lose his fare. fellow! he was really entrance was denied them. the farce, he got down and the stern custodians.

Meantime, they sat in the bare to the view of the which were just beginning continuous stream. Rack vexation. "How absurd she said. "If that fellow back, and drive us away, but out to him here."

Nora's cheek was flushed petty vexation of the moment cause; her gaze was fixed upon of the carriages eagerly, and

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the cabman, certain that his fare would not turn upon him, came back, and received orders to take them to the station. His eyes glistened at the long fare, and he mounted the box with alacrity—alacrity that drove Nora's heart into a wild flutter, for this was her last chance. As they turned, a carriage, drawn by two milk-white horses, rolled along beside them. There was nothing particular about this carriage—nothing ostentatiously patrician; it was the extreme finish which conveyed an irresistible air of high-bred ease and elegance.

She heard the wheels, and looked out from the side-window. She hardly recognised him at first sight. His profile was towards her. He was looking straight onwards, sitting like a statue, she thought. There was not the shadow of a wrinkle on his brow, not the trace of a care or of a thought—all was calm repose, ease, refined happiness. How could he look like that if he was not happy with her—that lady by his side? She saw her fully. Her face was turned nearly towards them, only her glance was slightly upward, over-looking the

humble plebeian Hansom cab. And such a face! Nora's heart stood still, for she knew the truth at once. The vision was gone in a moment, but it was fixed upon her mind. She turned to Rachel, who had seen nothing unusual—she did not know Percival by sight—and broke into a laugh. They laughed "consumedly," as Shakspeare says, all the way to the station. Nora was full of quaint remarks, original thoughts, which set light-hearted Rachel smiling.

In the train, under the dull light of the lamp, Nora professed she was sleepy. She liked travelling by night so much because she could go to sleep. She leant her head back, and closed her eyes. Rachel might smile, at least she could think.

Think! Was it thought that vision burnt into her memory, which stood before her eyes perpetually, as the red image of the sun stands before those who incautiously gaze at his meridian glory. That face, she had never seen its like before. She had heard of these things, but always deemed them fancies romantically exaggerated. She had read "*Lamia*:" she had heard of the

old world fable, of the serpent taking woman's shape to steal away the heart of man. She had heard too of Cleopatra, but this was not Cleopatra. Percival, in the olden time, had been fond of calling her "his serpent of old Nile," because of her changing moods, her rapid transitions, and her way when she was pleased of entering into his pursuits and pleasures.

But this was something for which there was no synonym. It was not the "Lamia," not the bright, bewitching beauty of the many-coloured snake skin transformed into a young and lovely girl. It was not the passionate, wilful Cleopatra. It was not the full-blown sensuous Semiramis. There was no synonym, nothing to typify it and shadow it forth. She had seen a little of that style of beauty before—something of that divine complexion, but this was not what she had seen. Neither was it the beauty, nor the glowing youth. With scorn, and hatred, and tenfold jealousy on that account, Nora told herself that this woman was nearly twice her age. What an insult to herself was this! She shivered,

first with burning heat, then cold. She was scorched and passed over her like the wind of a desert, leaving all dry and

Already her heart was burnt up before the simoon to that woman, this concubine. She felt that he was a child in her hands. She hated her through this experience of wiles and despised him the more utter weakness. He a strong man, a diary of events, no history; she saw it in a moment—she had seen him before—of it was that there was a stain—actually, this was the sting, the woman was unstained—perhaps she was no Mary Magdalene in days. She had got him a *self*. She was high, and she could have forgiven him but this never.

Beautiful! Nora felt remembering how beautiful the old classics, opening the

stepped into the warm bath to hasten the bleeding. Yet it was impossible to describe it. The features were faultless; but it did not lie in that, nor in the singular and almost unearthly loveliness of the complexion. Something weird occurred to Nora as hovering over this peculiar complexion. She had a recollection of the Vampires—the lovely women whose food was the hearts of dead men, torn from their corpses at the dead of night, and whose pale cheeks were unnaturally flushed. This creature too fed on the hearts of men. Hearts did she say; pah! they had no hearts.

She moved uneasily on her seat. Rachel thought she was dreaming. She had tried to banish the recollection of this creature, but in vain. It clung to her. She *would* cast it off—she would fling him from her for ever and ever. That was easy enough, she did not think of him. But that face would not go. It haunted her. In the high latitudes near the pole men see the sun for months revolving in its slow course around them; there is no night, the weird and ghostly ball of fire hovers for ever in the

sky. Nora could get no rest, no variation of thought or emotion ; that face followed her everywhere. It was ever her, and not Percival.

It was not difficult to get away from them at St. Leonards, and to retire early on the plea of weariness. Thank heaven, Sir Theodore was not there. In her own dressing-room, which opened off their bedroom, she knelt down to pray, mechanically. After awhile she rose again with nothing said—with not even a wish sent from the heart silently up to heaven.

She opened the window, and leant out into the night air. It was still and silent. The rain was falling without a sound. The ground had been covered with a crust of snow, and the drops fell on it noiselessly. It was melting ; it was milder. The long frost was going. The spring was coming ; she remembered the snowdrop. She looked up ; it was black as a pall. The slates projected a little, and the raindrops did not fall upon her heated forehead, though she could almost, as it were, feel them pass downwards through the air.

Looking up, she remembered a weird and terrible old legend of German antique lore. A sinner, one who had steeped his hands in blood and his lips in falsehood—a branded criminal, whom man and all nature abhorred—is left at last, chained to a tree in a forest, that wolves may devour him. Deserted by all, he prays that a leaf may be blown against his face, in token that the all-merciful God has not forgotten him; but the dead, brown leaves go rustling by heedlessly upon the breeze. Lifting his countenance to the sky in the dread dark night, he prays, and earnestly entreats that one single drop of rain may fall from Heaven upon his brow. But the heavy shower comes pattering down, and the water drips with steady monotone from bough to bough all around, yet not one drop falls upon him. Utterly deserted by man, and by Nature, and by Heaven.

Thus Nora felt.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE glorious, beautiful, and kingly Tyrian purple had a peculiar odour about it—a faint sickly smell, a dampness, a trace of the salt sea on whose shores the dye was made. Sitting in his robes of state, gorgeous and splendid, surrounded by courtiers and nobles—the envied, the feared, the admired—the monarch, if he but wore them long enough, became conscious of a slight but very perceptible scent. It was not exactly of the earth earthy, but it was not such as should have met an imperial nostril. It was something to remind him that he, too, was but mortal, and subject to human imperfections: there was a flaw even in all this grandeur. There came a time when it was a pleasure to be rid even of Tyrian purple. There came a time when the rich

fumes of the wine became a craving desire that it might overcome and carry away the scent of mortality. There came a time when incense, and spices of the South, and all sweet things, became a burden; and the heart sighed in the marble and cedar palaces for one long inhalation of the fresh, keen air upon the lone seashore. When the gorge rose at it all; when the inner man—the self-consciousness within, however crusted over and weighed down—rose up, and would be no more denied. Then, when the step was taken, and the Tyrian purple cast aside, and the spices trodden upon, and the marble and cedar spurned, with one sweet draught of the fresh air came a Lethe of oblivion. The palace and the incense were forgotten. All the long waiting and struggling, the subtlety and the crime, that were gone through for the crown, passed away out of sight. The hideous dream was over—the dawn had come; and the heart tried to be as a little child's once more, joying in the violet and the rose.

Deep, deep down under the apparent man—covered over, it may be, with the ashes of many years, the scoræ of passion, and

the lava of ambition, and these, too, spread over with their crust of civilization, cultivated into smiling gardens, and rich corn-fields, and happy glorious vineyards—under it all there is a buried city, a city of the inner heart, lost and forgotten these many days. There, on the walls of the chambers of that city are pictures, fresh as they were painted by the alchemy of light in the long, long years gone by. Dancing figures, full of youth and joy, with gladness in every limb, with flowing locks and glances wildly free. There are the green trees, and the cool shade, and the proud peacock in his glory of colour pluming himself upon the lawn. There is the summer arbour, overgrown and hidden with ivy, in whose dreamy, dark recess those lips first met, and sent a throb of love and hope through all the trembling frame. There, too, in those chambers underneath the fallen cornice, are hidden the thirty pieces of silver, the cursed coin for whose possession the city was betrayed, and the heart yielded into the hands of the world. There, also, hidden in still darker corners, mouldering in decay, but visible

even yet, are the bones of the skeletons of those who perished in those dark days, done to death by treachery at the gate. Heap up the ashes upon them; hide them out of sight! Yet deep as it lies hidden, heavy, and dull, and impenetrable as the crust may be, there shall come a time when the light of the sun, seen through a little crevice, shall pour in its brilliance upon them, and shall exhibit these chambers of imagery to the man walking in daytime. He shall awake, and shall walk through these chambers he builded in the olden times; and the pictures upon the walls shall pierce his soul.

With innumerable hopes and fears, with hunger and thirst, with the pangs of birth and death, innumerable multitudes of the tiniest creatures, living through vast periods of time, slowly built up from the lower ocean's bed those firm and rolling downs of chalk which are now the homes of men. How slowly events happen! How impossible it is to note even to ourselves the imperceptible agencies, the countless multitudes of thoughts and impulses, "the dreams in the midst of business," which by slow

degrees wear away our former selves, and change us without our knowing it?

He could not have told the why, he hid it from himself at first; but it forced itself by slow degrees upon him, this sickly odour of the Tyrian purple.

The palate had been overdone, the appetite overfed, the sweet things were not yet nauseous, but they had become suspicious. He did not accept them freely without examination. He began to choose between them, and to ask himself if he liked this or if he disliked that. How long shall the bond endure when the mind begins to cavil? In its noontide glory the sun cannot be looked at. We lie down upon the grass and listen to the breeze and the stream, and say, Praised be the sun, who is without spot or stain. Wait yet a little while till the evening comes, and the vapour of the horizon dims the vigour of his rays and enlarges the blood-red disk. Then the eye can rest upon it, and slowly comes out one great black dot—it is a spot upon the sun. He is not perfect—he is not without blemishes.

Having seen this easily, and without effort, it might be that there are others hidden.

Let us search, and the glory is gone then. Apollo is no more. The romance has vanished. There were no spots upon Pauline, no blemishes; yet there was something lurking. She was so graceful, so queenly, so refined, so elegant; there was nothing to desire in her that she was not. Yet there came up, ever and again, that sickly odour of the Tyrian purple; and there was no freshness, no keen, breezy air about her to invigorate him again. It was so slumberously sultry. The scent of the meadow-sweet charged the air with odour before the storm, till the nostrils could not endure it; and there was a faintness, a dizziness in the brain. He could find no fault with her.

He sat down deliberately to think—wherein lay her fault? It was in vain—she was perfect. He could not trace the change in him. It was so slow and gradual. But he was not so eager now. He did not watch the hands of the clock till it was

time to seek her side. He lingered in his own chamber, delaying.

There came a time when he found himself longing for the hour to leave, that he might do something to vary the sweet monotony. For his nature was strong and vigorous underneath. The thin crust of civilization, the shirt-front and the dress-coat, had given her her hold.

For a little while he panted to excel in the sphere where these do shine. But underneath there was a wild barbarian—an outer Gentile—a man in all his purity of strength and mind—ay, and in the purity of his evil nature, untamed, untameable. He had slumbered in the lap of Circe; her spells had been potent over him; but they had only penetrated a little way.

Whatever we may do, however deeply our attention may be engaged, and our heart and mind and soul bent upon an object, there is nevertheless still going forward in the brain a stream of unconscious thought, of unconscious cerebration, which, in the fulness of time, must come to the surface, and force us along with it.

The Ulysses in the man was slowly awakening. It was not her. She did not drive him away by injudicious wiles; she did not expose herself—he never suspected her of falseness. It was his own nature, his own inner self, that gradually threw her off.

If we could only see each other's hearts! Nora had seen his face as he rode in the chariot beside *her*. She had deemed its expression full of idle contentment, of refined and elegant happiness, unclouded, basking in the sun of *her* favour.

It was true that there were no lines upon his brow—that the countenance was wonderfully calm; but ought she not to have known him better? When was Percival's face ever calm with her in the old time when he loved her? It was the weary speculation in his mind, the constant and continued reverie into which he had latterly fallen, that gave his face that expression of dreary idleness. He could not understand himself.

And Nora thought that he was worshipping the woman by his side, while he was

studying to discover the reason
dissatisfied with her.

At last there comes a time
is unbearable; when not even
good society, and the strength
all can contain us. We must

Percival did not break
In the old time he would
horse, as a Tartar would
ridden at once far away in
his weariness vanished behind

But now he waited. From
to Paris in a week or two;
not fixed. Why linger
saw her to the station,
knees in rugs, he bought
fee'd the guard with a large
keep the man's family a moment
a warm farewell, he pressed
watched her eye, he waved
train moved, he waited till
round a curve. He turned
it was over.

A terrible loneliness
There was a vacuity. Was
the glittering slavery of Paris

filled up the time. The habit lingered on him. He even went, with a curious desire to analyse himself, to the street in which her house stood. Slowly he walked up and down the pavement, and pictured himself in his mind eagerly entering the well-remembered door as he had done not many months ago. A faint smile passed over his face as he saw himself as he had been then. He did not condemn nor despise himself, but he could not understand now why he did it. Restless, and uncertain whither to turn, he at last entered the theatre.

Before Pauline left he had looked forward to the time when he should be free to amuse himself in a hundred ways. Now he was free; but the music and the song, the dance and the glittering show, were in vain. He could not get away from himself.

Next day he was at home, at the old, old house in the country—the lone, solitary place he had anathematized for its dreariness. There was an ill-defined hope in his heart that the well-remembered rooms would soothe and pacify him. They would bring him back to look upon the world as

he had used to do ; they would restore his sight.

In the evening the butler brought him his letters. He sat before the great blazing fire, in his own old armchair, with the huge pile of papers at his feet. They had accumulated for months. He was now about to do business—it would distract him.

There were notes from his lawyers, from his bankers, from his tenants, from his friends. Carelessly he looked at the address, guessing the contents of each from his knowledge of the handwriting. There was one whose handwriting he knew full well. Large and bold, and yet delicate and very clear. Ah, Nora, it was your letter. Not the one you wrote in passionate reproach of yourself, but the first—the terrible string of fierce invectives against this man, who now at last, after so long a time, held it in his trembling fingers.

Nora never dated her letters, and he did not think to look at the postmark. In the affairs of daily life it is rare that the minute search of a criminal inquiry is gone through. He immediately concluded that it was

written after that one which he had received and which had filled his heart with the vanity of being beloved by two women at the same time. These bitter words were because he had not answered her. As he read on a knife entered his heart—the iron went into his soul. He saw himself as she had written of him.

She did not then know of his acquaintance with Pauline; but to him it seemed that she knew all, and described him from the truthful point of view. She laid bare the buried city of his heart—daylight entered into the closed chambers. Oh, Nora, Nora.

He remembered those pictures upon the walls, which had been painted in the olden days. He remembered his hopes and fears—the wild warmth of the kisses of those times. He remembered what a goddess she had been to him—to his young, fresh, and pure heart; how he had worshipped her; how she had spread a radiance upon the very ground over which she walked; and how beautiful she was. Her hand—its touch. He glanced upon the mantelpiece with a rush of recollections. Yes, there it

was, within easy reach. It was a hand in purest marble, sculptured with the delicate touch of a living artist. He kissed it. How he had loved the original of that hand, so cold and hard, though so beautiful to the eye! He had paid a fabulous sum to a famous sculptor just to come and hew that hand in marble. Nora had laughed at the idea, and utterly refused to allow it. But the sculptor was a man of romance—he entered into the idea of the thing. He was introduced to her as a stranger in Percival's company. He professed to tell fortunes. He examined her hand. An inspiration rose in his mind, and he carved this, this which Percival held upon his knee.

How lovely the curve at the base of the little finger—how delicate and taper the fingers! Those dimples, too, where the knuckles showed in snow—and the thumb, how exquisitely proportioned! He looked at it now with an artist's eye. It was perfect.

Still more daylight poured into the buried city—more pictures came out

upon the walls—and the foot stirred again the ashes and scoriæ. Those clear and delicate characters traced upon the thin paper before him were more potent than the magician's charm—they were as the writing upon the wall in the king's banqueting room, revealing his own rottenness. Yet more daylight, and there were the thirty pieces of silver—the accursed price for which he had sold his heart and bought the Tyrian purple of the world.

Percival moved not in his chair. The hours went by; still he remained with the sculptured hand upon his knee and the letter at his feet where it had fallen.

Bitter is the day when a man beholds himself.

It was midnight when he drew his desk towards him and slowly wrote. He did not ask her for forgiveness; he did not even own his fault. It was a mere formal and coldly-worded request for an interview.

In the olden time he would not have acted thus. His steed would have been saddled—his spurs would have been on; fleet as the wind he would have flown to execute

his changed purpose. But this was the power of the poison tree, the vast spreading upas; it had deadened and dulled his nature. It would be long yet before he could fully awake from that drowsy opium-eating.

He went out into the night to post it himself, as he had done before. He passed under the beeches—those beeches against whose smooth bark he had leant many and many a time in the moonlight, returning from Nora's home, and dreaming of her. He leant against them now, and looked up at the stars through the delicate tracery of branches. All things were returning—the old life was coming back to him. It was like the resurrection. Let us hope that he may arise with the same elements, but purified and chastened.





CHAPTER XVII.

PARLIAMENT was sitting now, and Sir Theodore was very busy. His visits were none the less frequent, but they involved an immense amount of railway travelling. Not even for Nora's faint smile could he forego the long debate, and the dull and weary hours of sitting on the benches. Even in her very presence his mind dwelt upon the arguments he had heard and the facts he had discovered which threw additional light upon the subject. It made him occasionally self-absorbed and abstracted to the verge of unpoliteness.

Nora did not resent this; she did not imperiously demand his whole attention; she did not disturb his reflections, nor call him to her side in the midst of a calculation. She waited calmly till he turned to

her, and poured forth the result of his thought. He rehearsed his speeches to her. He used her as an audience, arguing himself as it were into what he wished others to believe—leading his own mind up to accept the conclusions favourable to his party. When she had listened to him, when he had exhausted every side of the topic, and hit upon new ideas as he turned the old ones over before her, it seemed to him that he was in a measure inspired. The beauty of the listener imparted itself to the substance of his speech, and threw a radiance round it. He was very ardent—very much in earnest. She listened, and now and then suggested ideas. At first he was afraid that he was “boring” her; certain unpleasant thoughts occurred to him about the vanity of people who would thrust their ideas down others’ throats. But she was so attentive—she took such an obvious interest—that in a little while he had argued himself into the belief that it was his duty to rehearse all before her and to obtain her inspiration. He was her knight errant, doing battle in her cause. He entered the

House with the feeling that he represented her—this glorious creature, this choice product of nature; that he was working for her, to gratify her noble ambition, an ambition that must reach its height in and through him.

Her ambition! Ah, Stanley, you little understood her. Nora was exceedingly fond of the fine heart-music of the air, "My lodging is on the cold ground," and she had once so far betrayed her enthusiasm to Percival as to declare that she would sooner have written such an air as that and be a pauper than receive one hundred thousand pounds. And she meant it; she really would have so chosen had it been in her power. Her soul fed itself upon art in its thousand forms. It was this deep longing of the heart which she could not express, and which was obscure in its exact meaning even to herself, that had made her so fond of lingering in the old church at Stanley in the days gone by. The dim, tinted light, the architecture, the dreamy solemnity unconsciously excited her to that state of mind which most readily receives the im-

pressions of colour, and form, and sound as the agents of the beautiful. They did not show her anything new, no wonderful revelation, no vision of unearthly splendour, but they warmed the soul, till it saw beauty and art in the meanest and rudest of the Creator's works. So it was that her ambition was to do something which should produce the emotions she herself felt in others, and, to express her meaning, she said that she would sooner have written that air than receive an immense sum of money.

Yet Stanley thought that he was gratifying her ambition by the noise he made in the House. His mind was occupied with the minutest detail of the great bill of the session—no matter what that bill was; like all other great bills, it had its clauses, which were eagerly laid hold of by its opponents, and fought over far more than the real principle at the bottom of the whole. He searched and inquired into its every shade and feature; he hunted up things which, trifles at any other time, became suddenly magnified. He acquired a reputation for special pleading, and with it his mind grew

narrower every moment. This was to satisfy Nora's ambition! She did not know what they meant. To her secret heart it was the greatest puzzle in the world why there should ever be such a bill at all. Any ordinary person with the most limited intelligence would, she thought, have seen the necessity of the enactment years, and years ago. Why, then, should they dispute it? Why should all these great and clever men waste their time fighting over it? In this she showed the strength of the abstract principles in her; but also her ignorance of the world, her total lack of power to perceive that the jar of personal interests indefinitely multiplied, was the real cause of the delay. This was her weakness. Stanley's weakness was that he over-estimated the value of the artificial product of these conflicting personal interests. It was to him as a dogma is to a fanatic, a matter of life and death, a matter of eternal importance. It was his weakness, too, that he identified himself so thoroughly with it, he lost sight of the fact that the bill could have progressed, or could have been delayed

even, if he had not exist-
magnified the importance
more he magnified his
estimation. His presence
to it.

Percival's vanity had
tarily at least, put so high
feelings and emotions than
plated writing a new book
should supersede the Bible
think and feel as he did—
of nature and of Heaven's
utterly ridiculous of a
distorted dream of his
there was more in it than
pursuit. Percival's work
When circumstances made
self, it was the conceit
which he thought of giving
The unconscious cerebration
been going on in his mind
perception of the glorious
nature—of the stars, the
of art—which perception
liarly acute, when his
exalt himself, and think

himself, forced itself forward, and he grasped at it as the readiest and best means of showing his worth. He could no more have written down that stream of unconscious thought than he could have turned sensation itself into material shape; but he conceived the idea of doing so. However ridiculous in its outcome, it was a nobler idea than that which Sir Theodore was following.

Gratifying her ambition! Oh, Nora, Nora. This was not the least of the mischief her perverted nature led to. It was deceiving him, cruelly deceiving him. But she could not help it. A feeble plea, but true.

There are times when, despise ourselves as we will, we cannot help what we do. The fierce rage and jealousy, the acute sensation of insult, the eager desire for revenge, all these, and the burning heat of her parched heart, had swept away her moral sense. She did not even reflect an instant on the dishonourable course she was pursuing. The calm patience with which she listened to Sir Theodore was the effort of a mind

strung to its highest pitch of endurance and determination. She would do it. She would be superior to Percival, and the pain and insult he had cast upon her.

She did not perceive that she was really lowering herself to his level. How should she? Was it not enough to have driven her proud nature into crooked ways?

How easy it was for her too! He was so ready—so eager for encouragement. Theirs had been such a dull and tame courtship—so utterly unaffectionate. It was so little that she had to do to set him aflame. Only a glance, only a gentle gesture, a word now and then—a faint pressure of the hand, barely perceptible, so slight that it left him in torturing doubt of his own sensations.

The fascination crept upon him—his life became a fever. He stayed not to think. He threw himself with ten times more ardour into the bill; he allowed his mind no rest; it flitted from one point to the other. In truth it could not rest. It acted as a subtle stimulant, pervading all his veins.

Had it been necessary to have gone further to inflame him, perhaps her own act would have risen up against her, and she would have revolted. But it was so slight, so imperceptible.

She was hardly conscious herself of the change in her manner. After awhile there was a strange soothing feeling resulting from his increasing admiration, his fast developing enthusiasm of love. It was like a balsam cooling a raw and smarting wound to have this man for ever at her feet. She was a little more able to bear the secret pain. It lulled her working mind to rest like laudanum. The excitement was subdued. Thus it was that she became strangely calm. Her heart did not flutter when she felt that the hour was at hand. She slept soundly. She did not dwell upon anticipation.

The days are gone by when men fell upon their knees, and with trembling accents asked their fate. The oracle, which can only be consulted once, is now approached under the guise of the simplest occurrence of daily life. An engagement may be entered

into at a dinner in the present
and without a word passing
bear the remotest allusion to such
the uninitiated hearer. The tone
in answer to the commonest com-
impression of the manner is
illustrated book, and the glance
it is acknowledged; a mere ac-
an opinion expressed. Even
ceptible than these are the age
engagements are made in
Almost unconsciously both parties
an occasion—a party, a ride, a
is said or done during that moment
not seen or heard by every person
Yet from that date these two
and they look back to that da-
mencement of the new era.

She could not have even
defined the day at which this
place. But the understanding
them, and upon all around them
all was agreed upon; the details
ment only had to be settled.
for Aunt Milly, and for Ger-
who acted as her adviser.

never alluded to them in Nora's presence. They were too delicate, he thought.

Nora made no sign. Mentally, she had turned her face to the wall. There was nothing unusual in it—nothing so startlingly novel. The idea had been before her for months; now it was partly realized it seemed to have lost its significance. She was only a little more languid than usual. She rose much later, and professed to feel tired. Aunt Milly's affectionate zeal of course called in the doctor, and he prescribed strengthening medicines. There was nothing serious—no radical disease; all she wanted was rousing, and a little tonic. Aunt Milly was reassured. The coming bustle of wedding preparations would surely rouse her. So she let her alone, and said nothing. Rachel did not exactly like it.

Nora would go to the piano and play a few bars, and then her fingers would fall from the keys, and she would sit silent and motionless before the instrument for half an hour unless spoken to. Then she started, and turned sharply. Yet she was never thinking of anything; so she said, and it

was the truth. The whirlwind of passion had carried all away before it; it had exhausted her, and still more so from the strong efforts of concealment she had made. And now there was no energy left in her; she did not think of anything; she deemed that her life was over to all intents and purposes. Her determination was firm to endure without a sign, but went no further.

There came at this time a letter one morning for Nora, in a strange and unknown handwriting. It lay on the breakfast-table for hours, as she slumbered, or rather laid motionless, upstairs. She had given strict injunctions that she was not to be disturbed on any account in the morning—she was so tired always. Her letters were of no consequence; they could wait. There was a terrible irony in this that morning. Motionless, silent, without a thought or a wish—
asleep, as it were, while awake—she was lying in the glorious spring morning, with the sunlight streaming through the window, utterly inert. But a few feet beneath that letter was lying on the table, waiting for her.

It was curiosity that led Aunt Milly to

lift it, when no one else was in the room. There was nothing very blameable in that; the woman was weaker than most of her own sex. But it led to what was exceedingly blameable. The handwriting was strange and unknown to her, but the post-mark was at Nora's home; and the crest upon the envelope—ah, she knew that well. A monomaniac for collecting stamps, and crests, and monograms—it was perfectly familiar to her; it was Percival's crest. Without doubt the letter came from Percival. She had a good inkling of their quarrel. What if he had returned?—Her pet scheme was in danger.

She called in Gerard to her assistance; it was the worst thing she could have done. To his twisted and crooked nature, it was impossible to advise anything but an underhand course. Still he would not open it. By no means; that would be criminal; it would be highly improper. How keen his perceptions of right and wrong were! what a true and moral man this was! thought Aunt Milly. What would he do? He would put the letter in a larger envelope,

and return it to Percival with a note, mentioning the engagement with Sir Theodore; if Percival then still wished to forward it to Nora, he could do so. What could be fairer?—what more proper? It was just to every one concerned. Aunt Milly wrote at his dictation—

“Miss M. Wollaston presents her compliments to Mr. Percival Gifford, and wishes to call his attention to the fact that the lady to whom the enclosed letter is addressed is under a formal engagement of marriage with Sir Theodore Stanley. Under these circumstances, which were possibly unknown to Mr. P. Gifford, Miss Wollaston thought that possibly he would regret if his letter came into Miss Nora’s hands; and she has, therefore, returned it to him.”

Wootton posted it at once. They said nothing of this to Nora. “You would only awake her curiosity—possibly her sympathy,” said Wootton, that deep student of human nature.

Half an hour afterwards Nora came down. She was a little more energetic. The sunlight, of which she was passionately fond,

had put a little life into her. It was such a beautiful day, she must go for a walk, would Mr. Wootton accompany her? Of course Mr. Wootton accepted the gracious invitation, and they passed the post-office together on their way to the beach





CHAPTER

EVENTS are so
pass. What a
of organization
about what is in itself a
There is such an enorm
to be foreseen and care
All this was very nau
was her own special des
should take place as qui
course she did not say s
but she intimated it t
was only too glad to ac
of the letter in the stra
awakened her to the dan
of delight for which she
life might even now fai

This was the second
looked promising ; but



match-making had suddenly collapsed, like Jonah's gourd. She could not tell what tiny worm might even now be eating its way through the outer rind. "Haste to the wedding," ran through her ears perpetually. Sir Theodore was delighted when she conveyed Nora's wish to him. It was truly flattering, this desire of hers to join their fortunes at once; more than that it was the most decided outward sign of her love for him which she had yet shown. And it suited so well with his Parliamentary duties. It really was rather trying to be perpetually on the rails, and the Session promised to be a very exciting one, requiring the nightly presence of every member who had "views." It showed how great an interest she took in his career.

More than once he had dropped a hint that he wished St. Leonards was nearer St. Stephen's. He had regretted it afterwards; it was thoughtless of him—it was even an approach to saying that he preferred Parliament to her society. But Nora, noble girl, had not taken it in that light. On the contrary, she had endeavoured to carry out

his wish. It was extremely considerate of her, it showed how deeply she had his welfare at heart; it was the strongest mark of her affection that she had exhibited.

These two had never kissed. They had been constantly in each other's company for months; it had been an avowed courtship on the one hand, on the other it had been tacitly accepted. They had been to all intents and purposes engaged for months, formally for some weeks. Such a familiarity was quite warranted by their situation; they had endless opportunities for it. Yet their lips had never met. Sir Theodore never attempted it. It was not that he was so cold and utterly artificial that he did not desire the felicity; in his heart he longed for a nearer and closer approach.

But he had closed the door against himself. From the commencement he had shown a subdued admiration, not an enthusiastic affection. He had carefully eschewed the slightest demonstration. He had laboured to impress upon her that he, Sir Theodore Stanley, Bart., M.P., was a gentleman of gentlemen, incapable of solecism.

He had built up around himself a fortification of delicate reserve, which it was impossible to overstep. In proportion as he had done this, so there had grown up a similar invisible but impassable boundary around Nora. She had assumed the same position that he had, with this addition, that her sex was in itself a barrier to freedom of intercourse.

So it was that their lips had never met. There were times when Sir Theodore thought much of this. He was quite aware that it was his own fault, if fault it was. Yet he did not quite know that he was satisfied with his own handiwork. There were times when he had a faint suspicion that he would have gladly welcomed an encouragement to overstep his own rules. But that encouragement did not come. He was not so wrapped up entirely in himself but that he had friends at the clubs. He had heard of warmer intimacies than his with Nora. He had heard men dilate upon the exquisite pleasure of a woman's lips, a perfectly innocent pleasure too. It was not altogether a pleasant reflection for him, that he had never——

No matter. There was this at least to be

said. He had acted as he ought to have done—he had remained exactly and precisely true to the logic of his life ; he had taken no liberty, he had acted as a perfect gentleman. Nora had, on the other side, behaved as a perfect lady. There was something extremely delicate and high-bred about this style of courtship after all. It was patrician in the highest degree—the severely chaste production of the highest art. They required no embrace, no vulgar demonstration, to assure each other of their undying affection. Their intercourse was of the soul, their bond of connexion a similarity of taste. But Sir Theodore, artificial as he was, was human after all. It was hidden and glossed over ; but nevertheless, there was an unsatisfied longing in his breast.

This was another reason why he so eagerly grasped at the suggestion of an early marriage. After marriage, surely they should meet on other grounds. Their lips would meet then. His heart bounded at the thought. Poor Sir Theodore ! poorest of all men, with all thy riches, with all thy honour, with the love of thy youth almost in thine

arms; for it was all a rotten, gilded show, and he deemed it a verity. The date they fixed at last was early indeed. Nora started when she heard of it, but she said nothing, and it was taken for granted that she acceded. There was barely time for the lawyers to draw up the settlements, still less for the milliners. These days to come must be one long bustle from dawn till far into the night.

Sir Theodore had now the benefit of his foresight in drawing up a draft of the settlements he meant to make so long before. It was with a glow of natural satisfaction that he drew the paper from his desk; not only because of the success of his plans, but because of the tribute it bore to the method he displayed in all things. His method was correct—the logic of his life beyond cavil. It is needless to say that his intentions were liberal. The man, narrow as was his mind, and artificial as was his interpretation of life, was not mean. He was rather too liberal, too open-handed. Yet, even in this there was a suspicion of a certain irrepressible vanity; it was as much as to say, “these

riches I throw away are nothing to me, I am above them." There was a quiet approbation of himself in his manner. He was always Sir Theodore.

Nora was still more abstracted, but no longer languid. She was restless now. She was never still; her hands were always in motion.

Some deep observer of human nature once said that a man could subdue everything else but his hands. He had watched a great leader in the House of Commons under a savage attack from the Opposition. The great man's face, trained in a hundred debates, was passive as a statue's; his eye quailed not before the torrent of invective; the sting of caustic wit could not move his lips to sharp reply. But his hands were behind him—so was the observer. His hands would twist themselves in and out of each other—humanity forced itself out in them.

She could not tell herself what she felt—she could not recognise her emotions. This was not a time when reason, or even feeling, ruled her. It was a time when the great

primæval instincts of woman's nature were in conflict within her breast. She was helpless in their hands. These jarring currents whirled her whither they willed, to and fro. Only her hands could not keep still. If there was nothing she could do, she would sit with them interlocked, twisting the fingers over and under and round each other.

It would have been painful to watch her had any done so. But they were too occupied. She, the central figure, the chief actress in the great drama they were rehearsing, was left alone to study her part in solitude.

She did not think of Percival or of Theodore. There was no personal leader to these deep instincts that moved her on either side.

The forces of her nature were arrayed against each other—the fight laid with them.

It was neither Percival nor Theodore. It was herself divided against herself.

Even at this supreme moment of torture she, perhaps, remembered less of Percival

than at any other time. She hated the sound of the sea, once so dear to her. She would not go out because of it. She hated the sound of the organ—it was with difficulty they got her to church on Sundays. They struck her too deeply, these things—the sea and the organ. She felt that the fibres of her being would give way if she listened to them. Eagerly she tried as it were to fill her ears with sand. Her nerves were strung to their highest pitch—they were so acute, stretched so beyond all endurance, as an over-wrought violin string, that the touch of the bow would snap it. This could not last. The string snapped in this way.

It was near the time of the full moon and the spring-tide. The sea rose to its highest level, till the shore seemed but as the edge of a brimming basin, over which the surging flood must pour. The winds broke loose, and rushed wildly over the world. It was a crisis of nature—the throes of a great being. The supreme moment of conflict was just before midnight.

They were all asleep. The house was quiet as a tomb—it was vast, and the rooms

high, causing an echo to every creak of the window-frames under the pressure of the strong gale.

Rachel was slumbering peacefully at her side; but Nora could not sleep. The roar of the sea, usually unheard, to-night penetrated into that fashionable square—nature would be listened to. She laid and listened—the thunder of the surge filled the room with a mournful, monotonous sound. She did not think—but she *felt*. Silently the tears gathered in her eyes, and rolled slowly down her cheeks. She did not check them—she did not think of them. It was the first time she had given way since that fatal journey to London.

It might have been an hour—it might have been more—that she laid thus pouring out her very heart in tears. She did not know why she did so, it was almost in a dream that she arose noiselessly and stepped out into the dim moonlight.

She passed to her dressing-chamber, walking and acting as a somnambulist. She lit a taper, took up her gold pencilcase, which

lay upon the table, and hurriedly wrote a few words upon half a sheet of note-paper. They were scrawled with trembling fingers, and blotted with the fast falling tears, barely legible; but they were written, burnt into the paper with the hot agony of her heart.

Even if the words should be half obliterated, *he* must know their meaning, if only they reached him. It was a last despairing appeal to Percival.

She slept peacefully after this, holding her letter in her hand upon her breast.

But with the morning there came a difficulty. How was she to post it? Aunt Milly, warned by experience of that letter which had waited so long upon the breakfast-table, was for ever upon the watch.

It was impossible that any one could leave the house without her knowing it. It was impossible for Nora to go out without Aunt Milly's company. . Aunt Milly would not even trust her with Rachel. She might confide everything to Rachel; but no, she *could* not do that. Does any

woman ever fully open her heart to another woman? With one of the old, old impulses, she went to Wootton.

Gerard, who had been away for a time, was staying with them again now. Nora did not know it yet; but Sir Theodore had asked him to be his best man on the approaching felicitous occasion; and Gerard had consented, with a smile.

She found him in the library. She could not have told why she went to him. Perhaps it was the instinct that told her of his old admiration; an idea that if he admired her, he would be faithful.

She made no preface; she did not even blush, she was too terribly in earnest. She simply said, "Gerard, will you post that letter for me, and say nothing to any one?" and laid it before him.

It took him by surprise. Had she gone round about the point—had she finessed and endeavoured to entrap him into acquiescence, he would have gained time, and he would have begun to temporize, as was his wont. But as it was he could only profess his

willingness, and she was gone. She would not wait to explain.

“Percival Gifford, Esq.”

Gerard hated her at that moment. He saw it all in a moment. He had always half-suspected that she did not care for Theodore. There was a grim satisfaction to him in that—the marriage must be an enduring misery to them both. It was their due—they despised him. It was sweet revenge upon her; for Theodore, he cared nothing either way. And here she came with a letter to her old lover, the one to whom he verily believed her heart was irrevocably given, and asked him to post it.

Doubtless she had repented—she wanted to draw back; this was to bring him again to her side, that she might be happy with him.

Gerard’s lip curled into a sneer, with hate and envy, and jealousy. He post that letter?—not he. She should have Stanley, and much might she enjoy him.

He put the note in his pocket-book, and went out—this was to make her believe he

had done it. He passed her in the hall, as he had expected, waiting to see that he did what he had promised. He said he was going for a walk.

Let us not dwell further than we can help upon the infinite meanness of this man. The only twinge in his mind was that Stanley would be happy—at least for a time. Yet it is a question whether even Gerard was utterly bad. Remember that he had loved her in his way.

“To be forwarded immediately” was written on the address. Nora calculated again and again how long it would be reaching him. It would get to Broadrip to-morrow; next day it would be in his hands; in three days he would be with her. It was a fortnight that very day to the marriage. There was yet time. She was almost happy those three days. She was calmer. Her hands were still. She even played a little on the organ; the sound seemed to strengthen her—to approve of what she had done.

But the fourth came, and there was no reply; no well-remembered step; no eagerly longed-for voice. Then a terrible fear seized

upon her. Was he dead? She dared not ask, but surely they would have told her; she would have heard. Or were they keeping it from her till after —. There was time, though, even yet; he might be in a distant county—two or even three days' post. The greatest trial of all was to sit still when the hour of the postman arrived—not to rush to meet the servant with the salver. It never occurred to her that Aunt Milly might suppress an objectionable one. She did not think much during those five days. Her mind was wound up to the highest pitch of expectation; she could do nothing but anticipate—nothing but hope, hope, hope.

But the sixth day was different. Another even yet more terrible fear assailed her. Was he married? Had she written that tear-blurred letter to a married man—was he even now showing it to *her*—was she laughing over it—that face she had seen riding triumphantly in the carriage—she might be smiling over it even at that moment! Her hands worked again. With suppressed passion she tore her handkerchief into strips, one

by one. She thought, as she surveyed her handiwork afterwards, that thus she could have torn him to pieces—her base and cruel Percival. Her teeth would set themselves tight together, till it almost pained her like lockjaw. She was hardening into adamant.

And Gerard held that letter in his pocket-book. His keen eye saw her agony unsuspected by the rest. It was like caviare to him at first, but after awhile he could not watch her. He wandered restlessly about the house, penetrating into odd and out-of-the-way places. There was an unconscious desire in his mind to find some novelty that would make him forget what was going on. In the library, his usual resort, he passed over his favourite authors, and reached down those whose opinions were contrary. He wanted to forget himself; to read something new—something of the opposition.

It was in this mood that he laid his hand upon a great illuminated Bible in the centre of the library-table. It was not by one of his favourite authors. It attracted him as something so entirely novel. He opened it at haphazard. Like all other books, it natu-

rally opened where there was a marker. The marker in this case was a pencil sketch. It was a very slight outline affair; rather stiff, not at all a *chef d'œuvre* of one of the great masters; nothing to linger over lovingly and reverentially. Yet Gerard remained poring over that sketch for an hour without moving. He had been abroad in his day, and had heard of the duel. But he was an innate coward; and he glossed over such an idea with the after reflection that the duel was out of date for gentlemen in England. He did not carry that conclusion out to its logical consequences, and admit that revenge itself was also out of date.

His whole mind was occupied with an absorbing desire of retaliation. For this sketch was that very one of Sir Theodore Stanley's, which he had dashed off as they sat upon the beach months before, inspired by the idea of Gerard without his wig, without his false teeth, and make up. It was that which Nora had laughed so heartily over—which had so greatly encouraged Sir Theodore. Nora had taken possession of it, and in her careless way pushed it inside this old

Bible just for the hour, intending to remove it, but had forgotten to do so. There it had remained, many times sought for in vain, till Wootton found it himself. Sir Theodore, with his usual methodical precision, had affixed his signature to it; there it was in minute letters in an oval at the left-hand corner.

Wootton never would have a valet. He alone must see himself in the glass at night as he really was. How many times had he trembled at the idea of discovery! Here he was revealed. It was as if Sir Theodore had stood behind him as he faced the glass in his locked chamber, and sketched him on the spot. How many had seen this sketch? There was the sting. How many men are there in the world who would have learnt from this severe lesson to despise themselves, and to abandon their artificial pretensions? If there are any, Gerard was not of them.

The man's mind was simply mad with rage. But he was cunning; he had that advantage still. He knew that, to make a blow effectual, it should be struck at the weakest part. Sir Theodore had struck him

in the weakest part, he reflected, with a grin of suppressed temper. Sir Theodore's weakest spot—that where his heart was most deeply concerned—was his marriage with Nora. If he could but disappoint him in that? He remembered Nora's letter; he drew it from his pocketbook. This was it. He would post it immediately. Stay; was there time—could it reach? He reckoned up the days; there were four till the marriage; there was yet time. He looked at his watch—joy; it was half an hour yet till the first post went out.

Gerard was methodical, too, in his way. He reflected. It was just possible, after all, that this letter, written a week before, was not so urgent as to bring Percival at once. Nora might have thought that she had plenty of time even yet. How could he remedy this. He took up a pen, and wrote a few words upon the envelope, on the opposite side to the address, over the crest, just where some persons put "private"—six words only, in his thin, Italian hand. Then he posted it himself.

It was Gerard's turn now to watch for

the postman. He did it most carefully. He remembered Aunt Milly's course with Percival's letter; he determined that she should not get hold of the next that came; he would take it to Nora himself. He had a resource which Nora had not thought of—he bribed the servant to bring him all the letters first.

The time grew fearfully short. Gerard could not sleep—could not rest. He was more excited than he had been for years. The calm way in which Sir Theodore spoke of his approaching happiness drove this wretched creature frantic. Amid it all he could not understand how Nora bore it so quietly.

“The devil is in the girl,” he said to himself. “She is like iron.”

And she was like iron. She made no sign.

They put her at last in the carriage that was to convey her to the altar, calm, tearless, statue-like. With her there was only an uncle, who had been raked up for the nonce to give her away—a deaf old fellow of sixty, silent and feeble. The coachman

was the old family coachman of Aunt Milly's house—steady of course.

Nora looked down and set her lips as the carriage began to move. She was to be married at eleven by programme; it was already a quarter past. There was no time to be lost—no time to linger on the way. The quicker over the better. As they rolled out of the square she heard the roaring of the sea upon the beach, and turned sharply to the uncle, and shouted in his ear that it was a beautiful morning.





CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN a man wants to get away from himself, he is pretty sure to go on the Continent. Even in our highly civilized days the old instinct remains to flee from the surroundings which are associated with sorrow or disappointment. In the primeval times no doubt the savages actually did escape much misery in this way. So soon as the corpse of the loved one was disposed of in the traditional way, and the proper sacrifices had been made to the rude gods of the period, they seized their bows and spears, and started away for distant woods and mountains, to begin a new life. Their memory was short; a few weeks spent in a place where there was no tangible signs to remind them of what they had lost sufficed to blot out all recollection.

They really did begin a new life. But in our time of highly cultivated minds it is of little use to travel—we carry our marks and signs with us. Yet the old instinct remains, and it is hard to resist the impulse to place distance between us and the scene of our grief.

Percival did not at first exactly comprehend the full extent of his disappointment when his letter was returned with Aunt Milly's explanation. Even when he was most deeply devoted to the fascinating Pauline—when the scarlet shawl had thrown its glamour over him—there was still in his innermost heart a vein of tender recollection. However unfaithful he might be himself, he still believed that Nora would never desert him. She might flirt, and coquette, and go on to a disgusting length with Spencer and such fellows, but the idea of her ever actually separating herself from him never occurred to him. Perhaps if it had he would have been more cautious—he would not have treated her with such off-hand disdain—he would not have so openly followed Vietri. But, under all his jealousy.

and suspicion, there was in his heart a deeply rooted faith in Nora's fealty. There was even a certain detestable pride in the thought that do what he might she would never leave him. She would follow him like a beaten dog. In a dim, rough sort of way he actually thought the better of her for this very cringing fidelity; he put her on a higher level for that very feature of her character. When he came back to his home, and found that letter of Nora's, and read it, and saw himself and all his meanness reflected as in a mirror, stricken down as he was, and, for the time at least, sincerely despising himself, he, even then, had a certain inner feeling of complacency. She was his still. He would make her amends—he would reward her—he would spend the rest of his life in a devoted attempt to make her happy. He never for one moment dreamt that she would refuse to accept his ministrations, otherwise he would probably have written something more than a mere plain request for an interview.

It struck him like an irresistible blow, the news of her engagement. He turned

the letter—the returned letter—over and over in his hands like a man beside himself. He could not credit the evidence of his own senses. Yet there was no mistaking it. There was no construing these scratchy thin sentences of Aunt Milly's in any other way. She had left him of her own accord.

He left the house almost immediately—he did not exactly know what he was doing. But, as hinted before, under this man's shirt-front and dress-coat the instincts of the old barbarism, the old hunter's life, were strong and irresistible. It was his instinct to get away from pain—to place as long a distance between him and it as possible. A few hours afterwards he found himself at Dover. Mechanically he took the first steamer—it was for Ostend. Early next day he was in Brussels.

These are not the days when men mark their disappointment or their rage by extraordinary exhibitions of themselves. It is no longer the fashion to do as Don Quixote did for Dulcinea's sake—to fast among rocks and woods, and flagellate the bare body. There

was nothing unusual in his mode of life at Brussels. He would have gone further than this, but the thought struck him—whenever did hope desert a true man?—that even now she might recall him. He would not go too far; he would be within reach. Above all, he would give strict injunctions to forward all his letters. Plenty of them came in consequence. He was perpetually on the watch for them, invariably to throw them aside with impatience. But this mode of life was little better than remaining at home. The constant communications—the very post mark brought back the old associations in all their force. Engaged to Sir Théodore Stanley! Sir Theodore Stanley. Had it been Spencer now, he thought with a sneer, he might have done something then. But this man—this man whom he remembered, with a bitter smile, he had been in the habit of praising to Nora. When his jealousy prompted him to disparage all others, in order to seem fair and impartial, while he ran them down with every species of detraction, he had not found words good enough to say for this Sir Theodore. A

perfect gentleman, a man of probity, of honour, of upright life; a man above all flirtations, above coquetry. He remembered all this very well, it came back upon him like a stone he had flung up into the air. She had taken him at his word. He hated her, he would forget her. He would plunge into dissipation. Hamilton was right, no woman was worth a serious consideration. Truly, he had shown Nora serious consideration! To begin, he went to the theatres, especially to the exquisite little opera bouffe given in the Galerie de la Reine. The music was amusing, the dancers graceful. With his opera glass he criticised the shapes and the steps. He found tiers of company there—figures which recalled a well-known tall and glorious form. There was something lacking in each of them which Nora possessed. Sir Theodore Stanley was to have her! He—that little narrow shouldered, artificial idiot! Percival did Theodore injustice in this. He was not narrow shouldered in proportion to his size, though compared to Percival a mere shadow. Nor was he an idiot. But the man's temper and passion, dormant so long, were fast getting

the better of him. He was shutting his eyes preparatory to making a rush. The fierce untameable barbarian instincts in him were bubbling up. But he could not see whom to attack as yet. He only grew intolerably restless. He wandered all over the city. He threw himself into the street tram cars, and told the conductor to drive him to the devil. The conductor gravely fulfilled this injunction, which he took to be a form of *maladie Anglaise*, by landing him at the Bois de Cambrai; the farthest extent of his railway.

The man could not endure himself. At the table d'hôte it was all the talk that the Prussians had at last closed round Paris. No one could get in or out. There was a savage delight in his mind that Pauline was entrapped. He hailed it as a vengeance for Nora. He was no longer angry with Nora. Wild as he was, he was not unjust. He judged himself as severely as he would have done others. He only thought of her now with intense tenderness. He recalled the incidents of that six months' uninterrupted intercourse with her; he

remembered her smile, her very look. He saw her now from a distance, unaffected by the whirlwind of suspicion and distrust; he saw her in her real character. He recognised what a treasure he had recklessly thrown aside, and anathematized himself the more. He was going through the burning fiery furnace seven times heated.

The thin crust of over-weening vanity which Pauline had worked upon, melted away like snow. The old love and passion, the old true nature came back with tenfold force. He would have kneeled at her feet for forgiveness—there was no pride in him now. He was starving, and men are not choice in their selection of means then. It was utterly unpardonable of him to be so excited in such an age of calmness and quietism. It was very ill-bred. It was in this mood that at last they brought him his letter as he sat at dinner at the table d'hôte about six in the evening.

It was a scrawled address, hardly legible, enclosed in an envelope from his own home, and therefore three days old. With all his passion and hot impulsiveness he was yet

sufficiently civilized to betray no emotion before the company. He did not even open it—it lay beside him for all that weary hour of dinner. In good truth he was afraid to open it. He only saw the address at first, he did not turn it round. But when he had got back to his own private room as he put his finger to tear it open, these six or seven words written by Gerard caught his eye. They were these—"In four days they will be married!" After this he read the blurred pencil lines within. It is not needful to detail what the man felt. No words can ever do justice to the tumult of such a moment.

He ran at once to the porter—the encyclopædia of a Continental hotel. When could he start for England? The reply was that he could go, *viâ* French territory, that very night, only he must get his passport *visé* at the French embassy, or he would be stopped on account of the war. He could not go by the Ostend route till morning. He went to the embassy; it was closed. A cabriolet driver told him where the ambassador lived; it was about a hundred yards

distant. Time was precious. He flew there. His Excellency was engaged ; he was about to go to a dinner. It was impossible. Percival thrust some napoleons into the man's hand ; the fellow said he would see what could be done. He took the passport, and went in with it. Percival said to himself that he was safe. Again he ran the calculations he had made through. This letter had been three days reaching him ; to-morrow she was to be married. That was the fourth day. He should reach Calais about midnight ; land at Dover by two ; get to Hastings by six or seven. Pray God they might not be married at eight as some were now ! It would be sharp work.

But his spirit rose ; his eye glistened ; he felt equal to it. He extended his hand eagerly for the passport. The fellow was very sorry, but his Excellency had left his stamps at the office (about a hundred yards distant) ; the secretary was gone ; it was impossible. Percival turned white with rage. He left the place ; his heart almost stood still. To telegraph was utterly useless ; she would take no notice of that ; it was too

late; nothing would do but his presence. He wandered along the street as one in a dream. The only hope left him was that the four days meant four days clear from the day it was posted—that would make five in all; then she would not be married till the day after to-morrow.

Will it be believed that he, in the agony of suspense, actually went to the theatre? But he did. Not only that, but he lingered till the last, wishing that the performance would continue through the night. He walked up and down afterwards in the Place Royale till three. Then he went in, and packed his portmanteau. The train started immediately after six. At five he breakfasted. An hour afterwards he was *en route*.

Why dilate at this eleventh hour on that terrible journey? Literally the eleventh hour; for as the steamer moved from the harbour of Ostend, Nora started upon her drive to church. As she said, it was a beautiful day. There was not a breath of air. The atmosphere was balmy with the fragrance of May. The sky was intensely blue; the sea smooth as a mirror. All nature

was exceedingly happy. He sat upon the bridge, almost counting the revolutions of the paddle, eagerly watching for the white cliffs. Ah, Percival! travel never so swiftly, you must be too late. Nora is now upon her way. Not the wings of the swiftest bird could carry you there in time. It is not left to you; if there is hope it shall not come from your hand, lest ye should say, It was *I*.

She could not keep her hands from her watch. She must look at it. At last she held it in her hand, so as to glance at it perpetually. The poor old man at her side noticed nothing; she might as well have laid it openly in her lap—she had but one idea, to get it over. Her blood was in a tumult of haste. There was no agony of mind or heart; *that* was over. The wound was seared with a red-hot iron. It might ache, but it would not bleed. She longed for the supreme moment, as the condemned long for the fall of the axe, with a dull feeling that, after that, there will be oblivion—oblivion, at least, to this earthly torture. Her mind was far before the slow wheels of the cumbrous carriage,

carefully driven by the old coachman, proud of his horses. She was terribly afraid that he would miss his way—he who had lived in St. Leonards forty years and more. Haste, haste! It was twenty minutes past. The church was a long way yet. She could control herself no longer; she called to him to hurry. He responded with a cheerful, complacent, “All right, miss;” and faintly touched the sleek horses with his whip. They moved faster for a few paces; then fell back upon their accustomed rate. Her hands began to work painfully. She looked up at all the public buildings—into the shops—to see the time. It was strange how the clocks varied. She noted that; and her mind actually reflected upon it even in that hour of fate. There was the half-past—unmistakably the half-past. She was certain the man had mistaken his way. She called to him to stop; he did so; she asked him where he was driving her. He replied to St. J——’s. But that was wrong; she eagerly explained, it was not St. J——’s, but the other church. No, it wasn’t. He had received orders to take her to St.

J——'s, and there he should go. He went on again.

In the agony of the moment she put her head out of window, and called aloud. A policeman heard, and came running up. Now, she thought, I shall be safe. The constable was exceedingly polite, and argued with the coachman; but he could not interfere. He endeavoured to persuade Nora that she was mistaken. This drove her frantic. "Well, at all events, tell him to drive fast; when he arrives, he will find himself mistaken," she said.

The coachman, stubborn as he was and pig-headed, was a little startled by this time; he put his horses on their mettle, and she leant back again. The old uncle wanted to know what it all meant. She shrieked in his ear as well as she could, but it was in vain; he could not understand. All he said was, that the coachman was thoroughly trustworthy. Then he took a pinch of snuff. In a few minutes afterwards they reached St. J——'s. Nora saw the doors were closed with a dull feeling of satisfaction—at least she was right. The coachman, really alarmed, turned

the carriage, and set off as sharp as he could go; they rocked and jolted over the inequalities of the road. Nora had been to several marriages in her time; she was trying to recollect how long they had taken.

Eagerly the bridegroom was waiting for his bride. He too had his watch in his hand. Gerard was there, and several others of no account to us. Spencer was in a distant corner. Master George was there too: Nora had insisted upon his being asked to be present. It was a fancy of hers; she knew that he at least was in earnest on her side. They waited at the door, getting terribly anxious. Sir Theodore conversed in a low tone with Wootton. He talked to disguise his impatience. The quarter, the twenty minutes, the half-past came, and Nora was not in sight. Then it was resolved to send Master George to see what was the matter. But Master George was sought for in vain. He had disappeared. Stanley remembered that the boy was a favourite of Nora's; he thought that most probably he was gone to meet her already. Ten minutes



first stroke of noon. It was impossible that day.

* * * * *

“How is she now?” asked Sir Theodore of Aunt Milly. This was between three and four in the afternoon. She was calmer, but still crying. She had given way on reaching home, it was nothing but natural, poor thing. Could he see her? Well, perhaps it would be better not till the evening.

Meantime, she was still determined to go through with it. She wished to be married on the morrow. Rational as he was, fortified with reason and logic, and the sciences, Sir Theodore must have been more than man had he not felt gloomy. There was something so terribly like an omen in it, thus to fail at the very moment of consummation. And the *contretemps*, to a man of Sir Theodore’s calibre, was exceedingly annoying. It would be talked of everywhere; it was not unlikely to get into the papers. He exhibited no outward sign beyond a certain taciturnity; but inwardly, to use an old word, he glowered. He had accompanied

Nora back to her home ; he would not leave it in daylight for the world. He felt that every one would be looking at him, pointing at him. Yet he was eager to get away—eager for the darkness to leave the house. Only he wished to see her first.

They were sitting at a silent dinner about half-past six. Aunt Milly, Sir Theodore, Gerard, and George, all moody, all inclined to quarrel. They only agreed in one thing—nothing was too bad for the coachman. The fellow must have been drinking, and mistook his orders. Aunt Milly felt particularly sore, because she herself had told him where to drive. She had particularly told him that it was not St. J——'s. There was no doubt how the mistake arose ; she had been over-careful. Too much tying loosens. She had confused the man with reiteration. They were discussing this point when the footman announced that a gentleman wished to see Miss Nora. Hardly had he said so, than Percival, who had followed him, walked into the room. They rose from their seats in amazement. Percival calmly demanded Nora. His

suspense had been so long that it had actually calmed him. He had already heard that the marriage was delayed in the hall.

“By what right,” began Sir Theodore, literally stuttering with unusual passion, and rapidly advancing.

Percival simply placed Nora’s pencilled note in his hand. Stanley glanced at it, turned pale as death, and rushed from the room. In the agony of the moment he overstepped all the bonds of society. He was with her in her boudoir in a moment. He fell on his knees before her—this artificial man—unable to speak, and held up the fatal piece of paper. Rachel, who had been bathing Nora’s temples with eau de Cologne, dropped the vinaigrette. Nora started up from the sofa; they were both frightened at the expression of his face. Mechanically she took the note, saw that it was her own, and a deep blush overspread her countenance.

Sir Theodore’s mind had instantaneously reverted to his old torturing doubt; had she ever really loved Percival; did she still even think of him? Little did he deem that it

was like this that he should put that question. Nora's wedding-wreath all disordered, and the orange flowers scattered upon the floor, was lying on the table, her veil and dress upon the chair. She stood before him in the plainest morning dress, looking down with averted glance, her face pale and her eyes red and swollen with crying, but oh, how unutterably beautiful! Never in his life had Stanley felt how he loved her as at that moment, when it was to be decided. He hoarsely asked her if she loved "that man;" he could not form the word Percival.

"With my whole heart," she said, with a flash of her eye, that pierced him like a sword, and a ring in her voice that sounded to him as the last trump.

She could not pity him—could not spare him at that moment. She had suffered too much. The truth rushed from her.

Sir Theodore left the room with a bowed head and a tottering step. He went to the library. Aunt Milly came to him there, and got him some brandy. She was livid with rage—she knew all. She tried hard to spur him on to claim his right even yet.

She would send for the police, and turn that man into the street.

Stanley, as soon as he could recover himself, begged her to be quiet. God forbid that he should force Nora's heart—ay, and God be praised that he had not already committed that crime in his blindness.

With all his artificial ideas, his stilted vanity, Sir Theodore acted as an upright and noble gentleman at that crisis of his life.

When he left the house, which he did shortly afterwards, Nora was sobbing in Percival's arms.

It was useless for Aunt Milly to sneer, Percival never heard her, Nora was really unconscious.

Rachel drew her aunt from the room, and left them alone—these two, from over whom the baleful shadow of the "Scarlet Shawl" had for ever departed.

They had been severely punished for yielding to its influence. Nora, for her attempt to lead the life of a flirt: Percival, for his worship at the shrine of conceit. Let the red rag flutter and flaunt itself as it

might, it would no more attract either of them from the path of natural affection.

* * * * *

It was not till after Nora's marriage with Percival that Master George made his confession, and boasted of his successful mischief.

At the moment when they searched for him in vain in the church to send for the bride, an idea had entered into his head, suggested by the disagreement of the watches. He had clambered up the belfry-stairs, and quietly put the church-clock on a quarter of an hour, happy in the thought that he should give his darling Nora another day's respite at least, even if it did not cause still more delay.

Had he stayed to reflect a moment he would never have done it; but he did not reflect, he rushed to execute it on the spur of his excitement.

The disagreement of the watches made them all accept the decision of the church-clock as final.

No one knew anything of it but himself—he had been afraid to tell any one. It is

easy to imagine what a favourite Master George was at a certain establishment—how he shot and hunted, and had his own especial pony, and a nice round cheque, when his long visits at last ended.

Gerard's share in posting the letter was never openly alluded to. The envelope was lost, so a source of terrible anxiety to him lest the delay should be discovered was removed. Though nothing was said, it was clear that Nora had a grateful memory for him; the mean wretch basked in her smiles, when he visited her, and held his peace. Percival lent him two or three thousands.

The Opposition came in about two months afterwards, and Stanley became Secretary. He was throwing himself with still greater ardour into politics when last heard of—perhaps to forget. He was not the stuff to commit suicide.

The Prussian bombs spared Pauline—as everything else had done, old Time himself included. She was in Vienna when last heard of: but this is a subject buried in the deepest oblivion both by Percival and Nora. Her name is never spoken—her existence

never alluded to—let them quarrel as they might, and of course they had their little jars at times, though ever so generally happy.

Nora was wise in this—she never flung it in her husband's teeth. In his heart Percival appreciated her silence. She had her reward in increased love and tenderness.

THE END.

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